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An Ethnography of Distinction: Dynamics of Collective Taste-Making

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An Ethnography of Distinction: Dynamics of Collective Taste-Making

Elissavet Mamali

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath

School of Management

October 2013

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how taste is constructed at the micro-social level of a community of practice and to investigate the dynamics that underlie the process of taste-making. An ethnographic research was conducted in the context of an arts cooperative focusing on how members maintain status boundaries from dissimilar others (inter-group dynamics) and how they negotiate intra-group taste heterogeneity (internal dynamics). The findings indicate that the community symbolically demarcates itself from outgroups in an “us versus them” fashion by continuously juxtaposing its practices to those of competitive actors through “sayings” as well as “doings”. They also begin to mark out the appropriation processes through which members employ distaste to resignify and internalise meaning to their practices (a) by exhibiting tastes of outsiders if they can successfully negotiate their intent (recontextualising exo-cultural elements), (b) by negating tastes that are prevalent in the field in order to criticise subtly outgroup practices (appropriating practice through conspicuous absence) and (c) by negotiating the ‘tastefulness’ of objects that are not valued for their aesthetics by outsiders in order to provoke (resignifying prevailing aesthetics). Finally, the study conceptualises taste-making within the community as an ongoing dialogical process amongst members with heterogeneous views about “tastefulness”. Depending on their status, members employ strategies that help them either to actualise tastes that they favour in the context of the community or to deal with the exhibition of tastes that they are not in accordance with. The thesis makes a theoretical contribution to three areas; First, to literature on taste formation by accounting for the holistic outlook of community-based taste-making practices; Second, to our understanding of negative symbolic consumption by exhibiting the appropriation processes through which distaste endows meaning to practices; Third, to the stream of works on marketplace cultures by proposing a new conceptualisation of intra-group heterogeneity.

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1. Introduction

1.1 There is No Accounting for Taste

It has been reported that lying on his deathbed, Oscar Wilde remarked: “This wallpaper is dreadful, one of us will have to go”. But where does a man find the courage to make such convictions just when he is about to confront his ultimate fate? Judgments of taste are known to provoke extreme reactions of disgust or fondness which, aside from performing the function of segregating and labelling objects as tasteful or distasteful, most importantly tell us a lot about the appraiser. Tastes have the power to reflect, to some extent, one’s character, beliefs, upbringing, financial situation, country of origin, country of residence, social milieu and ultimately identity. And to showcase the wrong taste, by, say, spending your last hours in a room with the wrong tapestry, could be perceived as misconduct.

But what exactly is taste and why do people use it to define themselves and others? It is perhaps not surprising that during the enlightenment taste was considered to be a universal judgment of beauty. This is a view widely expressed in Kant’s ([1892] 1951) *Critique of Judgment*, and best summarised in Burke’s ([1799] 1990, 13) definition: “I mean by the word Taste no more than that faculty, or those faculties of the mind which are affected with, or which form a judgment of the works of imagination and the elegant arts. On a superficial view, we may seem to differ very widely from each other in our reasoning, and no less in our pleasures: but notwithstanding this difference, which I think to be rather apparent than real, it is probable that the standard both of reason and Taste is the same in all human creatures”.

Later critiques however, with a prominent work being that of Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), have dismissed universality and stability in judgments of taste, opting for a social constructivist approach that renders such judgments to be subjective in their entirety. Indeed, discrepancy of opinions as to what constitutes “good” or “appropriate” taste often results in taste “wars” regarding artistic or musical genres, fashion styles, cuisines, decoration styles and even behaviour. These wars not solely concern individuals but,

more often than not, they occur amongst varied social groups, whose members find comfort in the interaction with peers, members of the ingroup who share similar tastes or who are often referred to as “our kind of people” and drama in the competition with “them”, i.e. outgroups, supporters of a different genre or style, who just “don’t get it”. Tastes are hostile to one another. An individual or group may love what others hate and vice versa. And it is precisely this discrepancy that has generated the interest of consumer research scholars in the study of taste. Similarly it is not universality of judgment, but rather diversity that provides the foundation of this study. In other words, the cornerstone of this project lies in the idea that there is no accounting for taste.

The term taste, not unlike other figurative terms, is not quite accurate. “A definition may be very exact, and yet go but a very little way towards informing us of the nature of the thing defined” (Burke [1979] 1990, 12), but for the purposes of this introductory chapter, it is understood as a person’s ability to judge and recognise what is good or suitable, especially relating to such matters as: art, style, beauty and behaviour. Taste as judgment is not all that different from gustation, perception of which helps one to maintain a consistent chemical balance in one’s body. Similarly, judgments of taste help one to construct a consistent identity that communicates who one is. The biological sense of taste also protects one from unsafe foods, for if a person eats poisonous or rotten foods, they will probably spit them out immediately, because they usually taste bad. Similarly, judgments on “appropriateness” protect one from choices deemed unsuitable to one’s identity, thus ensuring that others do not get the wrong signals as to “who I am”. Finally, for someone to enjoy a slice of pizza, they need more than their basic taste as they also require their sense of smell. Without it, even though the tongue is still able to identify a taste, the food eaten will taste bland. Similarly, for judgments of taste to be fully encompassed, one needs a variety of supporting factors in place. Family, upbringing, education, peer groups and other social groups that one belongs to, all play their role in shaping and enhancing our appreciation or hate towards particular objects or practices.

Which brings me to the second question posed earlier, why do people use taste to define themselves and others? Why does taste constitute a connecting link between members of the same group and a boundary between competing collectives? Taste is a reflection of one’s judgment of the world and people will assess others based on that

judgment (or as with Bourdieu's famous quote "taste classifies and it classifies the classifier" (1984, 6). Clothing, hairstyles, music and film choices, home décor, holiday destinations, sports followed and even choice of partner, all constitute taste judgments that reflect just "what kind of person" their adopter is, or at the collective level, just what kind of community we are talking about. In an era when consumer culture is prevalent in all aspects of our lives, from exercising to motherhood and from traveling to education, taste is as important as ever. It would not be a stretch to argue that in today's consumption driven world, taste quickly and easily communicates the position that one chooses to take in the social world, for others to see and form opinions. From this standpoint it is not hard to guess why people say that "you are what you eat" or "you are what you wear". Consumption is being used as the primary means in order to achieve social distinction.

1.2 Approach and Scope of Research

This project is concerned with taste-making at the micro-social level of interaction and uses a community of practice as the unit of analysis. Following the principles of social constructionism that assume there are no objective standards as to what constitutes good or legitimate taste (Bourdieu 1984) and taking into account the instability of meanings which are necessarily bound to social interaction (Berger and Luckmann 1967), it seeks to understand how taste is negotiated amongst members of collectives and how it is used in the ingroup's attempt to gain distinction and maintain symbolic boundaries from outgroups as well as dissimilar others.

The project is situated in the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) tradition of Consumer Research. In the past decades, consumer research has enriched our understanding of consumer behaviour including motivations, preferences and buying habits. However, the perspective of consumers behaving like rational human beings, in other words, making decisions after processing all the available information in order to maximise satisfaction from their purchase, has started to waver against alternative schools of thought that challenge the rationality of economic/behavioural models in favour of an approach that encompasses the social and cultural aspects of consumption. CCT constitutes a paradigmatic challenge to the dominant econometric and cognitive

psychology approaches to the study of consumption and comprises a collection of theoretical perspectives, borrowing from fields as varied as sociology, anthropology and cultural studies, integrating the macro social theories of sociology with the thick description of anthropology (Askegaard and Linnet 2011) and placing the focus on how consumption, apart from an economic transaction, is an: experiential, symbolic and ideological process (Arnould and Thompson 2005).

At the core of these theoretical perspectives is the idea that people are not drawn towards the material and tangible properties of market offerings, but instead consume the symbolic meanings of products and services (Levy 1959), constructing in the process the so-called consumer society (Belk 1988; Gabriel and Lang 1995; Elliott 1997). Most importantly, however, what CCT has pointed out, is that such meanings are neither universal nor stable, and that researchers should account for the existence of multiple, heterogeneous and often overlapping cultures that help individuals make sense of the world around them, as well as the idea that such cultures are necessarily bound to sociohistoric contexts and thus cannot be expected to remain stable throughout time. In other words, consumer culture “conceptualises an inter-connected system of commercially produced images, texts and objects that groups use –through the construction of overlapping and even conflicting practices, identities and meanings- to make collective sense of their environments and to orient their members experiences and lives” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 869). Consumption is thus seen as a social process that “helps make visible and stable the basic categories of culture which are under constant change” (Elliott 1997, 287).

Following the instability of systems of meanings, consumers’ interpretive strategies have become a complex matter to be researched, requiring an examination of both what is contained in the representation of a product and what individual consumers bring to the process of appropriating it (LeVine 1984). Taking into account the idea that meanings are always socially constituted (Burger and Luckmann 1966), any attempt to account for them would require a close examination and understanding of the systems and social contexts in which they are embedded. From this standpoint, in understanding taste-making it is necessary to take an approach where socially constituted systems of meaning and the importance of context are to the forefront of the study.

To satisfy these conditions, this research has three important characteristics:

First, it focuses on the micro-social level of interaction (Cova and Cova 2002), or how taste is the result of interaction amongst members of collectives, because the meaning of market offerings is socially constituted and only significant when it exists as shared social knowledge within cultural groups (Berger and Luckmann 1967). For this reason, a community of practice, defined as a “group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger 1998, 10), is used as the unit of analysis. Accordingly, the project examines the manner in which (dis)taste is negotiated through the interaction of members of such communities along with the negotiation of their common purpose or joint enterprise (Wenger 1998).

Second, it is focused on the notion of distaste just as much as it is on taste, not only because it has been argued that the latter is more determining in drawing social distinctions (Wilk 1997), but also because distaste constitutes a silent partner to its positive counterpart, since every choosing “for” a particular object or practice, also means choosing “against” all the other possible options (Douglas 1996, 25). That is, distaste is intrinsically bound to relational oppositions and subtly implies a competitive relationship amongst cultures adopting different tastes. Douglas (1996), in particular, takes an extreme stance by arguing that cultures, which are the “arbiter of taste” (80), are at all times “accusing” all other, competing cultures, declaring in the process their commitment to a particular cultural stance, a process which forms the basis of boundary-making amongst social groups.

Third, it accounts for recent conceptualisations of taste, that dictate the construct is best approached as practice (Holt 1998), performance (Hennion 2001; 2003; 2007) and regime (Arsel and Bean 2013), by placing the focus on the manner of consumption as well as on the normative system underlying practice, as opposed to the object of consumption. Applying these conceptualisations, not only to taste, but also to its negative counterpart, the study is interested in (a) the understandings underlying why rejection behaviour occurs and (b) the manner in which it takes place. For this purpose, instead of focusing on avoidance of particular objects or actions, distaste is studied through modes of appropriation, in other words through the manner in which

communities alter the prevailing meaning of practices, as well as how objects are aesthetically and symbolically redefined.

Overall, the project approaches taste-making as a situated activity within the practices of the community. These practices constitute constant points of negotiation within the group and result in two outcomes: first, the positioning of the community in relation to its outgroups in an “us versus them” fashion and second, the reconciling of intra-group conflicts of taste that are due to the heterogeneous nature of the community. Theoretical contributions are made to the theories of taste/distaste formation, negative symbolic consumption and marketplace cultures, by putting together an integrative framework of externally driven (“us in relation to them”) and internal (intra-group heterogeneity) dynamics that affect the making of taste at the micro-social level.

The main research question that the study seeks to address is: “What are the dynamics of taste and how do they influence the taste-making process within communities of practice?”. To answer this, a number of issues are investigated, including: “How do members of a community of practice maintain the boundaries that distinguish them from dissimilar others?”, “Through what processes of appropriation is (dis)taste employed to internalise meaning to practices?” and “How is taste negotiated within a community of practice?”.

There are three points of differentiation from previous studies. First, although the extant literature discusses, both explicitly and implicitly, multiple contexts in which collective tastes are developed, maintained, contested and negotiated, a *holistic* outlook of such community-based practice has seldom been discussed. In other words, the thesis explores both how collective tastes are relational to the tastes of dissociative outgroups (i.e. Arsel and Thompson 2010; Wilk 1997; Schouten and McAlexander 1995) and how intra-group dynamics affect community practices (i.e. Chalmers et al. 2013; de Valck 2007), treating the two as interrelated and focusing on how their interplay constitutes the basis for taste-making. Second, unlike the majority of studies on taste that focus on the role of the construct in the perpetuation of class structures (Holt 1998; Allen 2002; Henry 2005; Üstüner and Holt 2010 etc) this project offers insights as to how tastes operate and are practiced within one social stratum. Third, most studies on marketplace cultures have treated (either explicitly or implicitly) collective tastes as unified wholes

that stand in opposition to the tastes of dissociative others (e.g. bikers versus car drivers [Schouten and McAlexander 1995], Burning Man participants versus Disneyland goers and Woodstock participants [Kozinets 2002] etc). By contrast, this work acknowledges the existence of intra-group heterogeneity and accounts for its effect in taste-making.

At this stage it is also worth clarifying that this is exploratory research, aiming to theorise taste-making in communities from a new angle, without the preoccupation (at least at this stage) of investigating how the findings could be proven useful for the design of marketing strategies of any kind. This is not considered a limitation, on the contrary as Askegaard and Linnet (2011) put it, “CCT obviously contributes to the noble and highly relevant process of securing culturally and socially informed environments at business schools” (382), while such sociocultural knowledge constitutes the basis of any kind of behaviour, including that of the consumer.

The study is based on a constructivist framework of inquiry and given that one of its aims is to understand the practices and relative perceptions of a particular community that has its own distinctive culture, an ethnographic approach was considered to be an appropriate methodological match. An “alternative” arts cooperative was selected as an appropriate context that enables theoretical payoff (Arnould, Price and Moisio 2006), due both to the intensity of taste wars within the domain of the arts, generated from passionate attachment of social groups to different genres, movements and style expressions, as well as due to the anti-establishment nature of the community that renders expressions of (dis)taste to be of grave importance. The cooperative is constituted by a group of volunteers who showcase films and host live music and performance events, for their own enjoyment as well as for that of the public.

A number of ethnographic methods have been used to gather data: observations, unsolicited accounts and non-directive interviews. Participant observation was conducted by volunteering in the community, a role which was maintained for one year (October 2011–September 2012). Apart from observing the physical activities of the group, valuable observations were also conducted by subscribing to the various mailing lists that the community uses as decision making forums. Getting closer to the members by adopting a volunteering role has helped in extracting the value of pure sociability (Hammersley and Atkinson [1983] 1995) as a way of developing trust and provoking

small talk. A result of this is the gathering of unsolicited accounts occurring either amongst participants or between the participants and the researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson [1983] 1995; Agar [1980] 1996). Finally, 15 in depth interviews were conducted with members from different backgrounds (e.g. age, occupation) and status in the community (core, marginal and peripheral members). The gathered data was approached through thematic analysis (McCracken 1988).

1.3 Outline of Thesis

The thesis is organised as follows:

The second, third, fourth and fifth chapters provide an in-depth review of the relevant literature. They start with consideration of the theories of taste formation (Chapter 2) and recent reconceptualization of the construct of taste (Chapter 3), thus accounting for the importance of its relatively under researched negative counterpart, namely, distaste (Chapter 4). Subsequently, the necessity of conducting research at the micro-social level is explained and justification for the choice of communities of practice as an appropriate framework to represent the unit of analysis is provided (Chapter 5). These chapters also demonstrate how theoretical gaps in the examined literature provide the basis for the research questions of the project.

Chapter 6 is made up of an overview of the framework of inquiry, explaining and justifying the ontological and epistemological foundations of the thesis, the methodological choice of ethnography and the data collection methods. The chapter also offers an in-depth description of the context of research, as well as an extensive reflexive account of the researcher's experience in the field. Finally, chapter 6 accounts for the limitation of the approach taken.

The research findings are subsequently presented in Chapters 7, 8 and 9, with the first two focusing on the externally driven ("us" in relation to "them") dynamics of taste-making, whilst Chapter 9 is concerned with internal dynamics and particularly intra-group taste heterogeneity.

The last chapter (Chapter 10) presents a holistic picture of the data, by integrating all the findings in a single conceptual framework that makes up the main contribution of the project. It finally discusses the theoretical contributions of the work in more detail, accounts for the limitations and provides directions for future research.

2. Theories of Taste Formation

No analysis of taste would be complete without first understanding the work of Pierre Bourdieu. His conceptualisation of taste is largely presenting individual and group preferences as the result of class identity, giving rise to the so called homology arguments. While this thesis is preoccupied with how tastes are generated and manifested within one particular stratum, placing the emphasis on taste wars amongst status groups (as opposed to social class based collectives), it is believed that an overview of Bourdieu's work and later criticisms of it, can provide the foundations for understanding symbolic distinction, whether amongst or within social strata, and is thus essential.

2.1 Taste as Class Identity and the Work of Pierre Bourdieu

From a structuralist perspective, taste is an expression of class ideology, an approach encountered primarily in the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984). Taking social class, defined as the position of an actor in an objective social space, as a starting point, Bourdieu demonstrates how an actor's class gained capabilities - including economic, cultural and social capital - develop dispositions that drive action, as well as preferences that reflect that objective position. Bourdieu draws heavily upon Marxist and Weberian thought, by arguing that taste is not independent of class struggles and structures of inequality, but is rather an additional component to be used in the conceptualization of class, and consequently another way for the dominant classes to maintain their privileged position. The field of cultural consumption is essentially seen - similarly to the Marxist idea of the superbase - as the field where differences are expressed and legitimized. Objective distance in economic terms, thus, becomes subjective distance through mastery of tastes. To gain a better understanding of Bourdieu's theory of tastes, it is worth demonstrating first his use of social class as a concept extending outside the field of production and ownership, being dependent upon social relations and the cultural field.

2.1.1 Foundations of Bourdieusian Thought

At the core of Marxist thought is the idea that societies are composed of a multiplicity of classes, a variety of social collectives identified primarily through their differences in their relationship with production. The great distinction amongst classes lies between owners and controllers of the means of production, and owners of labour that can be sold in exchange for a wage (Marx [1885] 1974). Controllers of the means of production exploit the proletariat by rewarding them for their labour with an according wage which, even though legal, does not account for the surplus value that is enjoyed by capitalists. In this sense, surplus value (referring to not only profit but also taxes, new capital investment, profits of dividends etc) that is “owed” to the proletariat is enjoyed by capitalists, leaving the labourers exploited (Crompton [1993] 1998). As a consequence, economic inequality is constantly reinforced, and the status quo continually perpetuated.

Of primary importance to taste analysis is the concept of class consciousness. Crompton ([1993] 1998) mentions that Marx makes a distinction between an unconscious “class in itself” and a conscious “class for itself”. The ruling class of every epoch is seen as a conscious “class in itself”, which therefore thinks and produces ideas. Consequently, “the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force” (Marx and Engels [1947] 2004, 64). By contrast, the lower classes, as mere passive receivers of these ideas, develop a consciousness that is in disagreement with their own benefits, whilst at the same time accepting this as the natural order of things, a state that became known by later Marxists as false consciousness. By arguing that “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence”, but, on the contrary, “their social being that determines their consciousness” (Marx [1859] 1962, 362-3), Marx demonstrates the deterministic nature of structure.

Another aspect of Marxist thought that is closely bound to early theories of taste is the constitution of society in two parts, namely, base and superstructure. That is, production relations comprise the base of society, which subsequently determines the social, political and cultural dimensions that constitute the superstructure. In Marx’s ([1859] 1962, 23) words “in studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish

between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out”. The base/superstructure approach, which was later on adapted and used by Bourdieu, indicates that distance created by differences in an actor’s objective position in the mode of production, is reflected in the customary aspects of life, including consumption. It is precisely through differentiation in everyday subjective practices that objective distance between actors becomes obvious. However, the conditions that led to the occurrence of these differences remain unknown to the lower classes, who as stated earlier, accept them as naturally occurring.

It is worth noting here that the base/superstructure approach has been highly criticised as being simplistic and overtly deterministic, thus leading to the development of two directions: a humanistic one where the importance of structure is recognised but is complemented with agency, and a scientific one which remains structurally deterministic (Crompton [1993] 1998). As will be discussed later on, Bourdieu’s work draws upon Marxist structuralism by attempting, however, to reconcile objectivism and subjectivism through the concept of the habitus and thus, falling within the humanistic tradition.

In line with Marx, Weber considers economic power as a basic criterion for class stratification. The “class situation”, he argues “is in this sense ultimately a “market situation”” (Weber [1968] 1979, 928). However, classes are not seen by Weber as communities that form the basis for communal action and instead, he argues that: “we may speak of a 'class' when (1) a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, in so far as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labour markets” (Weber [1968] 1979, 181). Consequently, following Weber’s definition of class there is no evidence that class cultures are in any way taste cultures, and members of a specific class are only linked together by similar amounts of wealth.

Most importantly, Weber recognises the existence of another factor that shapes social groups, one missing from Marxist thought, namely stand, which refers to status groups

who are defined by a social estimation of honour. “In content, status honour is normally expressed by the fact that a specific style of life can be expected from all those who belong to the circle” (Weber [1968] 1979, 187). It is important here to make a distinction between wealth, being a component of class and prestige being a component of status. Money by no means equals social honour, although the opposite might be true, in other words latter may be the basis for economic power. Consequently, according to Weber, status group stratification is not in line with class stratification and references to social order are references to social honour rather than wealth.

In his portrait of Weber, Bendix (1960) refers to “rank consciousness” (rather than class consciousness) as a result of status stratification, where collective actions of a group cannot be understood solely in economic terms. In this sense, estimates of relative prestige and membership in a particular status group are made from visible lifestyle markers and formal positions. As such, taste, as the ability to use status markers in order to reflect one’s position, is much more central to the Weberian rather than the Marxist approach and it comes as no surprise that in accounting for taste formation, the former approach of status stratification, has often been proven to be superior to the class stratification one.

In synthesizing the two approaches Bourdieu (1984) conceptualizes class as a structural positions space, where an actor’s place is defined by two resources: economic and cultural capital. Class fractions may also be derived from different proportions of the two resources. Following from this, Bourdieu’s conception of class, in line with Marx, encompasses economic resources as a central structural element but in addition, following Weber, it recognises that economic criteria are not the only basis for stratification and collective action. More specifically, Bourdieu uses the concept of cultural capital to explain how dominant groups maintain symbolic distance. Cultural capital becomes the basis for status boundaries and “is used to exclude and unify people, not only lower status groups but equals as well and so social exclusion exists to various degrees throughout the social fabric” (Bourdieu 1984, 31). However, it must be noted that unlike Weber, who explicitly separates the concept of status from that of economic capital, for Bourdieu the two are related by a similar distance from necessity and a “taste for freedom”. Social classes, thus, can be status groups in their own respect, although within a particular stratum, different proportions of economic and cultural

capital trigger the formation of intra-class status groups.

For this study, Bourdieu's continuation of Marxist and Weberian thought in the understanding of taste is useful primarily in tracing the relationship between taste and ideology. Defining ideology as "a world-view readily found in the population, including sets of ideas and values that cohere, that are used publicly to justify political stances, and that shape and are shaped by society" (Dawson 2001, 4-5), in Bourdieu's work taste *is* ideology. It constitutes an expression of the generalized worldview of its carrier as well as a reflection of the conditions that cultivated this particular taste to its bearer.

Most importantly, Bourdieu seeks to move away from the structuralist extreme represented by Marx and later Marxist theorists, where class accounts for human action in a purely deterministic way by controlling the superstructure. However, he does not encompass the opposite, extreme subjectivist view of Schutz's phenomenology - where actors build up the meaning of their own actions -, nor Garfinkel's ethnomethodology. His contribution stands in his attempt to present structure and agency in a dialectical relationship. He has characterised his work as constructivist structuralism or structuralist constructivism (Wacquant 1989), as from a structural point of view he takes into account objective structures that constrain individuals, while from a constructivist point of view he accounts for the social genesis of the habitus, as a scheme of perceptions, and that of the field, as the setting in which agents are placed.

2.1.2 The Social Construction of Taste: from Critique of Judgment to Judgment of Taste

Bourdieu's dismissal of universality and stability in judgments of taste constitutes another foundational aspect of his work. The social constructivist approach that renders taste mechanisms to be socially constructed has sparked intensive debates and has given birth to numerous scholarly works, all trying to come to grips with the idea that if what is good taste is not universal or objective, then what is it that enables individuals to form taste judgments?

Distinction (1984) represents a critique on another major work on aesthetic

judgments, that of Immanuel Kant. Even the subtitle of the book, “A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste”, is said to be a playful response to Kant’s “Critique of Judgment” ([1892] 1951). Kant is primarily preoccupied with the question of how are judgments about beauty possible and argues that the power of judgment might be organized and directed by a fundamental a priori principle that is unique to it. Kant should not be misread for suggesting an object signification approach, in other words that objects can universally be considered as beautiful because there is an intrinsic quality to them. On the contrary, his approach suggests that universality in judgment stems from features of the human mind – as opposed to from the object itself - that he subsequently calls “common sense”. Apart from universality, the philosopher identifies three more features in aesthetic judgments. The first, and most highly criticised by Bourdieu in particular and Marxist theorists in general, is the feature of disinterestedness: an individual will *firstly* judge an object to be beautiful and *subsequently* derive pleasure from it. In this sense, aesthetic judgment is free of both interest of the senses (which comes as a result of the judgment) and conceptual interest or interest of reason, meaning that the object is good and moral. The other features identified by Kant are purposiveness (i.e. the claim that a beautiful object has a purpose which however we cannot grasp) and necessity, which in line with universality states that everyone must have the same judgment, according to “principle”.

Bourdieu’s criticism of Kantian aesthetics lies primarily in the idea of disinterestedness, whereby for someone who does not possess the necessary cultural code, the gaze of an aesthetic object can only have “sensible properties” and no secondary meanings. Moreover, in contrast to the principles of Kantian aesthetics, he contends that working class individuals expect every image to perform a function and their judgments on objects are usually related to either agreeableness or morality. Bourdieu further argues that working class judgments usually involve a reduction of the object of art to things of everyday life, whereas by contrast, Kant’s pure aesthetic requires exactly the opposite, the ability to separate the object from everyday life. However, from a Bourdieusian point of view, to be able to appreciate objects in a pure way the subject needs to be free from economic necessity. Bourdieu sees this as “moral agnosticism” (1984, 5), at a distance from the natural and social world. It is further argued that “this aesthetic which subordinates the form and the very existence of the image to its function is necessarily pluralistic and conditional” (42), meaning that a

single object may be interpreted differently by different audiences and so one cannot expect a universal reaction. In Bourdieu's empirical work (1984), images shown to subjects were also often judged by their legibility - their ability to convert information-, thus contradicting essentially another Kantian faculty, that of finality without purpose.

It is worth adding here that the Bourdieusian approach of attributing taste wholly to social construction has not been left without criticism either. Jenkins (1992) argues that even though a rejection of Kantian aesthetics is well justified, Bourdieu leaves untouched the question of individual psychology in aesthetic preference, failing to explain the rise of movements such as modernism and criticising his theory as reductionist.

2.1.3 Taste as a Product of the Habitus

Taste has been conceptualized as the mechanism through which individuals classify, judge and distinguish the world around them. In *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu is describing the manner in which tastes are developed and expressed and examines the appropriation processes through which cultural objects are used in socially legitimate ways to convey the status of a particular social group. Tastes are seen as the result of social origin (usually measured by a father's occupation), upbringing within a particular social environment and education. Even though Bourdieu's work is mostly addressing the reception of various forms of art, there is no area of practice where aestheticization of life cannot take place and in fact it is particularly challenging and rewarding to apply this to the most commodified every day practices, like food or home decoration (1984).

Taste constitutes a classification mechanism, not only because it represents patterns of choice and rejection but also, and perhaps most importantly for the purposes of this project, its ability to "classify the classifier" (6). In other words, judgements of taste signify their adopter's identity and position in social space. Following a perhaps general and reductionist classification, taste can be divided in three categories: legitimate or highbrow, middlebrow and popular. Highbrow taste allows the top bourgeoisie as well as artists and intellectuals (who might lack economic capital but are rich in cultural) to incorporate art and aesthetics in their everyday lives. Middlebrow taste of the petite

bourgeoisie is distinguished by a constant anxiety and feeling of discomfort as to whether the actors have managed to “get it right”. As for popular taste, this can only be considered as a negative reference point by the other classes (57). Even though this classification scheme fails to illustrate the complexities of what is considered good, bad, elite or popular taste, it is nevertheless one that has been incorporated in numerous studies following the publication of *Distinction* (1984).

Bourdieu has come up with a formula, [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice (101), to demonstrate what directs the lifestyle choices of a particular class or class fraction. Taste, reflects class identity because of the existence of the habitus. In order to grasp the concept of the habitus one must take into account three dimensions that construct the objective space of positions: volume of capital (economic and cultural), its composition and trajectory. Differences in the overall volume of capital are responsible for defining different classes, while differences in its composition distinguish the various class fractions. The composition of capital also has an indirect effect on practices by giving specific forms to other individual characteristics, including age and sex (e.g. Bourdieu argues that there are as many ways of realising femininity as there are class fractions). In Bourdieu’s social space things become even more complex when considering the third dimension of trajectory, which refers to the different positions an agent will occupy in social space throughout his or her lifespan. This does not occur in a random way; rather the possible trajectories for a certain initial position are pre-determined, even in cases when random events have occurred (e.g. a war). Finally, an actor’s current position is never enough to define his or her habitus, as the way the acquisition of capital took place (e.g. through upbringing or through the education system) is also important. The trajectory effect may also play a role in blurring the existence of classes when individuals in the same current position are mistaken as “equals”. However, for Bourdieu, those who have moved to the new position form an already privileged one and will possess distinguished tastes that are naturalised in them, unlike those who have achieved mastery of the same tastes along the way.

Homogenous conditioning for individuals who occupy similar positions in the objective space will in turn provide them with similar dispositions which constitute the habitus. For Bourdieu this has “the capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste)”

(170). To rephrase, objectively classifiable conditions of existence (class) produce the habitus which in turn produces classifiable practices and systems of perception (taste) or to put more simply expressions of taste translate objective differences to symbolic practices. Following this definition, taste becomes a product of the habitus and taste cultures are essentially class cultures.

It is worth mentioning here that in Bourdieu's social space, status groups engage in different lifestyles, however, this is not a conscious process to gain distinction. It is precisely here that Bourdieu's (1984) work is different to that of Thorstein Veblen. Veblen (1899), in his critique of consumerism, came up with the term "conspicuous consumption" to refer to the spending of money and resources by people, in order to display higher status than others. For the author, exhibition of these tastes is the result of conspicuous leisure time, in other words, people strategically invest time in learning how to engage legitimately into showing-off practices. Bourdieu agrees with Veblen (1899) in seeing culture as a system of class symbols that reveal individual social positions, however, the first argues for an unconscious natural process that takes place through the habitus, while for the latter conspicuous consumption has a conscious strategic element in it. Following from this, Gartman (1991) argues that legitimate cultural tastes from a Bourdieusian point of view make their possessor look gifted in contrast to a Veblenian perspective where the exhibition of such tastes may result in the individual being perceived as an exploiter.

Bourdieu's work has been highly influential and cited by numerous authors, inevitably receiving both praise and criticism. Multiple empirical projects, particularly by the sociologist Paul DiMaggio, provide supporting evidence for his theory, particularly in examining the role of social class in relation to unequal arts consumption (DiMaggio and Useem 1978; DiMaggio and Ostower 1990) as well as partner selection and participation in highbrow culture events (DiMaggio and Mohr 1985). Other scholars, on the other hand, have often stated that the homology argument may be a characteristic particular to the French society that does not find application in other contexts, especially in the United States where individual tastes, scholars argue, are unrelated to social class positions (for example, Lamont and Lareau 1988; Lamont 1992; Hall 1992; Halle 1993; Erickson 1996).

2.2 The Role of the Market in Taste Formation

Volume and composition of capital, as well as trajectory in the objective space, may be the catalysts for an actor's judgment of taste in Bourdieusian thought, however, even Bourdieu himself was not oblivious to other, non-class related factors that may affect taste mechanisms. Most importantly, tastes are inevitably dependent on market availability. This is not surprising as it is the field of production that gives rise to that of stylistic possibles from which individuals choose features in order to develop a lifestyle. Following this, a vicious circle is created where tastes can only be expressed and realised following production offerings and subsequently, production can only function if different tastes provide a market for their products. An immediate consequence is that a change in the field of production triggers changes in tastes and similarly a shift in tastes, due to transformations in the conditions of existence, will trigger changes in production by favouring the products that best satisfy new preferences, thus resulting in the role of strategic actors in the market becoming crucial. In other words, the choice of a product will not only depend on the alignment of the logic of products and individual tastes, but will also usually be mediated by institutions, critics and the media, which in turn are also defined by their position in the field and are judged by actors according to this position.

To sum up, for Bourdieu, the market presents individuals with choices for cultural products whose appropriation mirrors an actor's social position and reinforces distinctions. A very different approach, however, is taken by Frankfurt School theorists, who argue that the market's cultural offerings conceal class positions by imposing a mass market for all, making all culture ideological. Even though Bourdieu, recognises that objects' correspondence to tastes is manufactured by professionals, he still sees tastes as the result of another mechanism (that of the habitus), while in contrast, Adorno and Horkheimer ([1944] 1972, 121-124, 154-56) argue that preferences for cultural products by specific classes are marketing-created and based on a strategy of pseudoindividuality: cultural products are not characterised by any distinction since capitalism has turned them into commodities. As such, taste becomes pseudotaste dictated by media distributed marketing images.

Gartman (1991), in his comparison of the two points of view on culture, critiques Bourdieu for being ahistorical and failing to grasp the specificity of capitalism. Frankfurt School arguments, on the other hand, are criticised for their lack of explanation as to how or why capitalism commodifies culture to conceal the existence of stratification. That is, Gartman finds the idea of elites consciously manipulating culture in order to reinforce the subordination of the masses instrumentalist (428), while it is further argued that Frankfurt School arguments, to an extent, fail to recognize the persistence of (class) relations that were stronger in precapitalist society.

A central point in the debate “mass culture for all versus stratification of culture according to social stratification”, is that late capitalist societies have to a great extent multiplied and massified the number of offerings. A consequence of this is that the homology between market offerings and classes seems to be non-existent, since one may observe members from all strata consuming the same massified types of goods and services. The phenomenon was picked up by researchers who attempted to explore whether differences in class position are indeed mirrored in consumption patterns, or whether capitalism has transformed the way people consume completely. Results point towards two different theoretical approaches: the univore-omnivore distinction in taste and individualisation arguments.

2.3 The Omnivore-Univore Distinction in Tastes

Empirical work in the past years does not always confirm the strict homology between class and taste. Instead, research shows the increased extinction of “snobs” (in the sense of individuals rejecting all but highbrow culture) and their replacement by omnivores (Peterson and Simkus 1992; Peterson and Kern 1996; Chan and Goldthorpe 2005; 2007a; 2007b; Longhurst and Savage 1996; Warde, Olson and Martens 1999). Omnivores are more likely to be involved in a wide range of activities ranging from highbrow to popular. In theorizing omnivorousness, Peterson and Kern (1996) demonstrate that it does not involve consuming just any type of culture without discrimination. That is, the authors leave some space for research on the way in which omnivores construct symbolic boundaries, not through what they consume but the way they consume it. In other words, omnivores are experimenting with the appreciation of

various types of culture by getting to know its values and rules. They get educated on how to pass aesthetic judgements on these forms of culture, taking into account the cultural producers involved and by using their cultural capital make meaningful comparisons of one culture to another. However, one must not forget that omnivores are judging various cultures from the relative point of view of the position they occupy in the social space, which reinforces Bourdieu's argument that preferences cultivated by these social positions maintain (or build) symbolic status boundaries. Similar findings are revealed in Chan and Goldthorpe's (2005, 2007a, 2007b) empirical work on the social stratification of cultural consumption (including dance, theatre and cinema attendance) in contemporary England and consequently the authors attempt to revive the distinction between class and status, first introduced by Weber and later on dismissed by Bourdieu.

It is worth stating here that the distribution of omnivores is not random across the population, for to the contrary, omnivores are more likely to be found higher in the social strata. In trying to account for this type of homology, Chan and Goldthorpe reject social class (measured in relations in labour markets) and identify education and particularly social status as the best ways to account for the stratification of cultural consumption. However, the distinction between status and class in the way the authors account for it is debatable. This is because, status in these studies has been measured by the occupational structure of friendship (2004, 2005, 2007a, 2007b) and as the authors argue "the closer together any two categories in the scale are, the more similar occupationally, are their members' friends" (2005, 196) Following from this, even though status is treated as separate from class, it is still measured taking into account positions in the labour market, leaving in the outset alternative ways of gaining social honour. With work being accused to lose its ability to shape the lives of individuals (Offe 1985) Chan and Goldthorpe's approach has been criticized as inadequate.

Conceptually, omnivores present similarities with the fraction of intellectuals that Bourdieu describes as individuals with high cultural capital within the dominant class, able to take multiple popular forms of culture and infuse them with an aesthetic dimension. Indeed, other authors have also claimed that omnivorousness is a characteristic to be encountered in those free from economic necessity and rich in cultural capital (for example, Smith 1994; Holt 1998). Holt, in particular, explains that

in a society where “market offerings have somewhat tainted the possible alternatives” (1998, 5), the high cultural capital fraction, in an attempt to gain differentiation, employs strategies that focus on practices, manner of consumption and synthesizing of objects, in order to shape a distinct lifestyle. An alternative explanation for the existence of omnivores comes from Gans (1999) who argues that “omnivores have blossomed because more people have the time, money and education to choose more culture from several taste levels, making all forms and genres of culture potential hinting grounds for them” (12). Indeed, better living conditions, in general, along with plurality of choice, have been recognised as yet others factor contributing to cultural democracy and pointing towards the disappearance of class and its effects.

2.4 Taste as Free Choice: Individualisation Arguments

Individualisation refers to differentiation of lifestyles free from the determinations imposed by social class. Tastes, following the individualisation argument, move “from habitus to freedom”, as Warde (1997) would put it. In contrast to the Bourdieusian view, this approach renders that agents develop tastes irrespective of restrictions imposed by structure. However, scholars warn that individualisation does not signify emancipation, in the sense that individuals can self-create the world, but rather freedom to choose and build an identity for themselves among a given set of options (Beck 1992). The role of the market in the process of taste formation remains, thus, as the only indisputable one.

In his analysis of the concept of freedom as a social relation, Bauman (1988) discusses the theme of individualisation and how it has evolved, hand in hand, with changes in societies. More specifically, it is argued that freedom comes together with capitalism and is defined as choices guided solely by a means-ends calculus. For freedom to exist, it is required that some individuals become subordinates and are used to serve the freedom of others or as Bauman puts it (45) “the effectiveness of freedom demands that some other people stay unfree”. A question here arises of who is entitled to freedom and who isn't. At this point Bauman's arguments on individualisation are not too far from Bourdieu's view, as individualisation exists only for those who experience freedom from necessity and so it would be wrong to try and interpret the unequal

distribution of the means to achieve freedom outside material factors, like the ownership and control of the means of production (Albrow 1997).

Bauman (1988) goes on to argue that the progression to a late stage capitalism has opened a new world that allows freedom to a much larger number of people, namely, a universe of consumption. The new phase “offers a space for human freedom greater than any other known society, past or present” (57). Following from this, the struggle for wealth and power has turned into competition for symbols and their sign value, a competition of tastes. Bauman further recognises that this freedom is a new, more efficient form of control that has come to replace bureaucracy, as it allows for the reproduction and perpetuation of capitalism. His argument is not unlike that made by Frankfurt School theorists and Marcuse ([1964] 1991), in particular, deeming consumerism to be a form of social control. It is ironic though that for Marcuse – in contrast to Bauman -this signifies a “state of unfreedom” in which people buy for happiness. Aware that scholars would criticise consumer rivalry and theorise it as “not really true freedom” as it is concealing the real competition, Bauman replies that such an approach would “change little, whatever is the truth” (59).

Giddens (1991) attempts to identify the conditions that explain the plurality of the modern age. First, alternatives offered in the post traditional order give individuals options among which to choose from. Second, drawing upon Berger et al. (1974), he highlights that unlike in the past when people lived in relatively closed social settings, modern social life has placed individuals in settings that are much more diverse, essentially creating a pluralisation of life worlds. Bauman makes a similar point by stating that urban housing projects also seem to have played a role, bringing together in neighbourhoods people from all kinds of backgrounds and thus forming new social networks. Finally, mediated experience through the spoken word of the globalised media has made accessible a number of potential lifestyle choices. Giddens (1991) also highlights that individuals “have no choice but to choose” (81) a lifestyle among this plurality and in line with Bourdieu (1984), argues that lifestyles “give material form to a particular narrative of a self-identity” (81). At this point it is worth asking the question, to what extent does Giddens (1991) sees this plurality of choice as freeing individuals from determinism? The answer would be to some. That is, on the one hand, it is recognised that multiplicity of choices does not imply that choices are accessible to

everyone. On the other, he suggests that even for the most underprivileged, modernity has changed the possibilities and that construction of lifestyles may become a new weapon for some.

In an attempt to examine the relationship between individualisation and taste creation it is worth pointing out that individualisation arguments give more weight to the material rather than the cultural aspects of consumption, when the latter calls for specific attention (Chan and Goldthorpe 2010). Following from this and taking into account specifically the effects of access to education in cultural consumption, it is worth going back to Bourdieu (1984), who clarifies that education opportunities may be present for all, but work differently for each person. The reasons for this can be summarized as follows: firstly, mastery of tastes acquired by upbringing becomes naturalised in an actor, while in those cases where cultural knowledge is firstly acquired at school it remains rather alien to the individual. Secondly, the legitimate way of appropriating culture taught at school essentially favours those who have had a domestic acquisition of it and thirdly, cultural mastery is often confused with school merit. In addition to this, individualisation arguments do not take into account stratification of the education system, whereby different institutions will have different status, providing individuals with different opportunities and social capital.

With regards to Berger's et al. (1974) argument that "pluralisation of life worlds" has brought people from different backgrounds together in the same settings, Bourdieu (1984) presents us with a counter argument based on his idea that while actors who are closely placed in social space often find themselves close in geographic space as well, the opposite is also very common. Individuals who are very distant in social space can encounter each other in the physical world and interact all the time. For Bourdieu these interactions only mask the structures behind them and one must not forget that "the truth of any interaction is never entirely to be found within the interaction as it avails itself for observation" (1989, 16).

No matter how strong the arguments against individualisation, it would be inaccurate to argue that late capitalist societies with their plurality of choice and expanded universe of consumption have had no impact on the way people consume and make use of culture. Altered living conditions have, indeed, presented individuals with different

opportunities, at the very least creating new and more subtle relationships between class origin, culture and taste formation.

3. Critical Approaches on Taste

Since the publication of *Distinction* the construct of taste has appeared in numerous studies within the fields of sociology, social psychology, cultural studies, consumer research and more recently organisation studies. Many of these works were conducted as a response to the ideas presented in *Distinction*, whether to provide additional evidence to homology arguments (for example Levine 1988; Warde 1997; Holt 1998; Allen 2002; Henry 2005; Üstüner and Holt 2010), to support partly Bourdieu's theory (for example Thornton 1996; Frith 1996; Turner and Edmunds 2002; Ollivier 2006) or to dismiss major aspects of it (for example Hennion 2007). Especially within consumer research, multiple studies not explicitly dealing with taste relate issues can be "read" for their reliance on the construct, i.e. taste as play (Holt 1995), taste as embodied feeling, including desire (Belk, Ger and Askegaard 2003) and love (Ahuvia 2005), taste as a determinant of fashion narratives (Thompson and Haytko 1997) etc. In this chapter, I focus on post-Bourdieuian critical works on taste that have contributed towards the re-conceptualisation of the construct by rethinking its properties. Most notably, taste is examined as practice (Holt 1998), performance (Hennion 2001; 2003; 2007) and regime (Arsel and Bean 2013).

3.1 Taste as Practice

Holt's (1998) work is preoccupied with the relationship between cultural capital and consumption and is largely supportive of Bourdieusian thought, arguing, however, that the relationship between class and tastes expressed in consumption preferences is much more subtle than previously thought. In examining the role of cultural capital in relation to consumption, it has been argued that different levels of cultural resources are influencing the consumption practices of individuals, including not only their tastes for products or services, but even more importantly the way that actors choose to combine and make use of market offerings, as well as the meanings that are derived from the process (Holt 1998). Holt emphasised *the manner* in which HCCs (individuals with high cultural capital resources) consume as opposing to what they consume, placing an emphasis on *practices* rather than objects. Through such practices HCCs attempt to

achieve differentiation, a task that becomes more and more challenging given the massified nature of market offerings which provides limited - if any - space for individuals to pursue authenticity.

The distinction between the object of consumption and manner of consumption is not completely absent from *Distinction*, where Bourdieu (1984, 282) argues that “the pursuit of exclusiveness has to be content by developing a unique mode of appropriation. Liking the same things differently, liking different things, less obviously marked out for admiration – these are some of the strategies for outflanking, and displacing, which by maintaining a permanent revolution in tastes enable (...) those whose appropriations must, in the main be exclusively symbolic, to secure exclusive possessions at every moment”. However, it is with Holt’s work on cultural capital that practices and modes of appropriation came to the forefront of discussions around taste.

3.1.1 Revisiting Cultural Capital

The construct of cultural capital, since its conception by Bourdieu and Passeron in 1964, has appeared in studies from a variety of disciplines ranging from sociology of culture and anthropology to organization studies and marketing. It describes the intellectual capabilities of individuals, not in the sense of intelligence, but rather socially acquired skills and knowledge that ultimately shape dispositions towards various aspects of life (to name a few: profession, partner selection, consumption choices and social milieus in which one feels at ease). It is cultural capital that generates embodied and manifested preferences and in this sense provides the basis on which tastes and distastes operate. From this standpoint, studying taste-making goes hand in hand with exploring the intellectual resources underlying it, because it is those resources that will direct both what is preferred/rejected and the manner in which the choice/rejection is practised.

While cultural capital is a versatile construct, indeterminacy about its meaning and operationalisation has not gone unnoticed and criticisms over its conceptual clarity are common. In this project, Bourdieu’s use of cultural capital in *Distinction* (1984) is revisited, while, drawing upon consumer culture works, Holt’s (1997, 1998) use of the

term is also found to be illuminating. Cultural capital is embodied in the form of inward skills, aptitudes and understandings, however, it is argued that it can also exist objectified in objects (e.g. works of art) and institutionalized (e.g. in university degrees). For Bourdieu (1984), the concept is directly linked to social origin and was initially conceived to explain how class structures are reproduced in the cultural sphere. Consequently, in most works it has been treated as a class attribute and as a basis for exclusion for those who do not possess it. The concept's value, however, lies in its ability to explain how individuals can gain differentiation - or a sense of distinction - by creating and maintaining symbolic distances, as well as to account for stratification amongst status groups of all sorts. It provides, in other words, the foundation for status boundaries and as argued, "it is used to exclude and unify people not only in lower status groups but equals as well" (Bourdieu 1984, 31).

In the sphere of consumption, cultural capital is seen as a code. Those possessing it have the competence to consume culturally charged products and services that are inaccessible to those who don't. Ability to master comfortably such consumption practices has further benefits in that it provides the possessor of capital with access to exclusive social environments. Indeed, a number of works in consumer research examine how mastery of "the code" affects various aspects of life including educational choices that "feel right" (Allen 2002) and distinctive financial management styles stemming from an individual's sense of power and status (Henry 2005). Cultural capital's ability to exclude and set boundaries is always highlighted in that those not possessing it are left trapped in constrained educational opportunities (Allen 2002) and poorer budgeting respectively (Henry 2005).

Holt (1997) criticizes previous works in their treatment of cultural capital solely as universal and for disregarding both the particularities of different fields and the sociohistoric conditions surrounding them. This nomothetic treatment of the construct is apparent in studies that equate it to high culture or culturally acceptable practices (DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; DiMaggio and Useem 1978). For example, Lamont and Lareau (1988, 156) argue that "for a signal to be considered a form of cultural capital it needs to be defined as a high status cultural signal by a relatively large group of people: the institutionalized or shared quality of these signals make them salient as status markers". However, inability to set universal standards as to what constitutes high or

legitimate culture and social constructionism's rejection of universality in judgement and disregard for objective standards that can determine the quality of various cultural objects and practices, have led to obstacles in the process of identifying how cultural capital operates. Since cultural offerings are not intrinsically divided to highbrow or popular, cultural capital and its expressions in tastes can only impose status distinctions amongst individuals and groups in very subtle ways.

The arbitrariness of what constitutes legitimate culture is evident throughout Bourdieu's *Distinction* (LiPuma 1993) not only with regards to the absence of intrinsic values that make up the meanings of cultural objects, but in addition to this, in the idea that there are no a priori reasons why or how certain tastes exhibited by one status group or another are distinguished as legitimate or not. The stability of cultural boundaries is fragile especially in large and differentiated societies, where cultural practices cannot be constantly compared to one another (Lamont and Lareau 1988) and where smaller status groups develop their own signs and standards which operate autonomously. Such collectives will adopt different cultural frameworks (meaning sets of values, beliefs, traditions and myths, followed by aggregates of people at any given time), appropriate them in their own unique way and possibly give them up when they become contaminated or lose their meaning. Inability to impose status differences because of the arbitrariness of cultural meanings calls for an approach that will operationalise cultural capital for the purposes of studying micro settings each time.

A proposed resolution to this problem suggests the breaking down of the concept into two components: abstracted and realized. More specifically, it is argued that "while not always clear in *Distinction*, it appears that Bourdieu and his interpreters now agree that it is the institutional logic particular to a consumption field located in a particular socio-historical setting that invests objects and activities with cultural capital"(Holt 1997, 99). Under this lens, abstracted cultural capital refers to knowledge, skills and dispositions that are universally transportable (e.g. critical thinking, creativity). However, consequential expressions of cultural capital exist as field related capital, which only has value within the particular field in question (e.g. an individual not interested in wristwatches is unlikely to appreciate another's knowledge of fine craftsmanship). The distinction between the two forms of capital indicates, firstly, the need to study matters related to taste within the boundaries of specific fields, since cultural capital is only

consequential when field-related, and secondly that in studying taste-making, both universal and field specific skills need to be taken into account.

3.1.2 On Modes of Appropriation

Going back to Holt (1998), at this point it is worth attempting to define just what appropriation is and what it involves. We often talk about appropriation in relation to art movements and art forms, but these processes are not absent from some of the most mundane aspects of daily life either. In art history, appropriation has been defined as “the direct duplication, copying or incorporation of an image (painting, photograph, etc.) by another artist who represents it in a different context, thus completely altering its meaning and questioning notions of originality and authenticity” (Stangos 1994, 19). The avant-garde movement of Dadaism, born out of rejection of the capitalist, bourgeois ideology and the horrors of World War I, was an appropriation movement due to its reliance on found materials (i.e. Duchamp’s porcelain urinal), abstract collages of existing images (i.e. Hausmann’s *Elasticum*) and mockery of existing works of art (i.e. Duchamp’s reproduction of Da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*), aiming to change public perception of what is considered art and provide images and items with an alternative meaning, one which the public has not thought of before and perhaps one that shocks. In daily life, it has been argued that technology in itself is a dominant mode of appropriation. It has allowed, for example, the recording of sound, thereby appropriating music in a raw material that is ready to be bought and used by humans (Boon 2007). In its turn, music moves humans and in doing so it appropriates them through “affection” (Boon 2007). In these cases appropriation refers to alterations in form and alterations in one’s state of being, respectively. Finally, examples of appropriation could involve changes in the “status” of an object. For instance, increased popularity of quinoa outside its native home of Bolivia, has changed perceptions surrounding the ingredient, turning it from a working class cereal to a delicacy. This intangible change in perception was accompanied by a tangible increase in price, ironically making quinoa less affordable to its original consumers. In another case, Stewart and Lacassagne (2005), explain how sports bear “hard work” connotations for Moroccans, while on the contrary have “recreational” meanings for the French and the discrepancy between the appropriation of values by the two national groups, symbolically demarcates the two societies.

Appropriation is not absent from consumer studies where it has been discussed in a multiplicity of forms, including but not limited to, the: manner of consumption (Holt 1998), meaning making through combination of narratives (Thompson and Haytko 1997), paradoxical embracement of anti-consumption ideology in advertising (Zhao and Belk 2008) and most commonly cultural appropriation, which refers to the use of material elements across cultural boundaries (for example Howes 1996; Ziff and Rao 1997; Schneider 2003).

After close observation, there are some common characteristics in all the uses mentioned above. First, they all imply taking something and using it *differently* to the manner that it is commonly used, in other words resignifying it. This gives rise to the second and most important attribute of all modes of appropriation, namely ownership. That is, what these processes imply is that by taking something and using it in a different way, attributing a different meaning to it, or combining it with something it has never been combined before, essentially resignifying it, the appropriator is during the process gaining ownership of its new mode of existence. Cultural appropriation, in particular, is defined as “the taking – from a culture that is not one’s own – of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artefacts, history and ways of knowledge” (Schneider 2003, 218). By explaining appropriation as “taking”, Schneider highlights the alterations in traditional uses and the new ownership of tangible and intangible cultural elements.

Boon (2007) recognises two different but contradictory meanings for appropriation. The first refers to taking something and claiming it as one’s own, bearing an underlying assumption that this “something” that belongs to someone else from whom it is being seized. The second relates to the etymology of the word and refers to that which is “proper” or “appropriate” to a situation or a person and thus rightfully belonging to him or her. Heidegger in his work on Enowning (1999), translated as “of appropriation”, criticizes the metaphysic tradition in philosophy which grounds all beings in essence. Rejecting the idea that “essence” is not transferable, Heidegger argues that essence, in other words the attributes that make an entity what it fundamentally is and give character to it, can only be appropriated to things. It is thus through processes of appropriation that things appear to have essence and value.

What is interesting about Heidegger's approach is that in rejecting metaphysics, our world can be seen as full of "mutually co-constituting and interdependent appropriations" (Boon 2007). Accepting that appropriations are everywhere, one may be able to distinguish between dominant and emerging modes of appropriation (i.e. traditionally pins are used to keep garments in place but in an emerging mode, they are a common accessory amongst the punk subculture) as well as to identify appropriation wars in cases when particular taste cultures threaten to change the essence of an object or practice. Finally, appropriation may also be thought of as "framing" of elements previously not connected to each other in any obvious way.

In examining the concept, however, both the characteristics of "ownership" and "properness" pose a problem to our understanding of it. If we accept that by owning something one can define its essence, how can any sense of belonging be constituted (Boon 2007) apart from legal ownership? Secondly, it is also unclear how "properness" can be constituted, although Heidegger argues that proper is that which is nearer to us. Apart from philosophical questions surrounding the nature of "ownership" and "properness", consumer research can attempt to shed some light on several other issues. In relation to taste, what processes of appropriation can we distinguish (i.e. meaning making, changes in use, changes in status) and what are the characteristics of wars of appropriation amongst status groups? Does a mode of appropriation need to be collectively understood to acquire power and validity? And most importantly, through what processes of appropriation is taste employed to internalise meaning to practices?

Going back to taste, modes of appropriation, as discussed by Holt (1998), refer to aesthetic redefinitions of objects which are attributed different meanings by different users or status groups. Taking into account Heidegger's argument, the embedded cultural value of objects is of less significance compared to the symbolic value generated through the mode of appropriation. From this standpoint, the cultural capital of a social group orchestrates the taste-making by directing both what it is that is preferred or rejected and the manner in which the choice or rejection is performed through different practices. Modes of appropriation are the result of the application of "presuppositional interpretive frameworks of taste" (Holt 1997, 116) which draw upon both abstracted and field related cultural capital. In other words, interpretive

frameworks of taste operate based on general intellectual capabilities and knowledge of specific fields, and direct the object and manner of preference or rejection as well as the rationale underlying such choices and aversions. Approaching taste as a mode of appropriation rather than as isolated preference of objects/services/institutions etc. is a first step towards a more dynamic conceptualisation.

3.2 Taste as Performance

Going back to reviewing recent re-conceptualisations of taste and summing up the various approaches on taste formation presented in the second chapter, they are either treated as a resource in the game of social reproduction and perpetuation of existing structures or, at the other end of the spectrum, as a process of continual selection amongst the plurality of offerings. Two points of criticism arise here. Firstly, taste is largely treated as unconscious. Hennion (2004), in particular, argues that deterministic approaches present actors as largely ignorant about the nature of what they do, placing aside the possibility of preferences being the result of an actor's reflexivity. Following this, Hennion calls for a pragmatic lens that moves away from simple connoisseurship of practice by including discursive devices, ways of acting and objects, as well as the body and mind. Secondly, taste is treated as a static concept, both in its structuralist and agentic form. Far from an observance centred on knowledge of objects, taste's performative nature involves actors using resources and capabilities reflexively in order to derive symbolic meanings (Hennion 2004).

Rather than looking into the deterministic external dynamics of social origin or the aesthetics of consumption objects, Hennion (2001) is examining the behaviours and materials involved in consumption, in the context of music. His focus is not on the process of selection of type of music, nor on the status one can enjoy from consuming a particular kind, but rather in the process of actualization (in this case the listening) and how this defines taste. In contrast to both Bourdieu (1984) and Holt (1998), social labels are dismissed in the author's work. It is possible, however, to find similarities between Hennion's performative taste and Holt's taste practices, in that both scholars agree that taste cannot simply be reduced to the choice for a product or service. However, whilst Holt is focusing on the meaning that individuals attach to their choices and their

referential interpretations of them, Hennion focuses on their actualization. That is, for Holt it is the symbolic analysis taking place behind choices that is important, whereas for Hennion consumption is not a static process but an “unpredictable event happening in real time” (2001, 2). By looking into the different ways that people experience music, he describes a taste for “ways of doing things”, which includes Holt’s “interpretation of doings”, but is not reducible to it. Instead, taste is described as an “active process” and a “meticulous activity” (13). Following this perspective, the role of actors in this process is a purely reflexive one (Hennion 2007), in a sense that it is actors themselves that have to unfold the properties of objects in order to perceive them as tasteful or not.

For the purposes of this project, the performative properties of the construct of taste are considered of interest, particularly because they can open up new ways of answering questions, not only in relation to how tastes are *formed*, but also to how they can be *used* in an: active, strategic and conscious manner.

3.3 Taste as Regime

A more recent theorisation of taste that takes a critical stance to previous approaches is that of Arsel and Bean (2013), which sees the construct as regime. Similarly to this project, in their study, while tastes are still bound to differential consumption, the distinctions in question do not concern social hierarchies as in the majority of previous works. That is, the effects of social class on taste are not dismissed, but are set aside in order to direct focus on how tastes operate and are practised *within* one social stratum. Such an approach comes in response to calls for research on the cultural and horizontal, rather than social stratifications, as directed by Thornton (1996) and Frith (1996). Indeed, a few scholars have empirically examined those systems of distinctions that divide contemporary culture, with subcultural capital and subcultural taste - as opposed to class taste - becoming all the more relevant (Thornton 1996).

Arsel and Bean (2013) focus on the existence of “discursive normative systems” that are able to guide and orchestrate the aesthetics of practice and that are created and spread through particular organisations or through transmedia. The concept of “regime” presents a much more holistic approach to taste, as it encompasses not only the preference for particular objects, but also Holt’s (1998) symbolic interpretations, by

looking at the “meaning” behind practices, and Hennion’s (2001, 2004, 2007) emphasis on the actualisation and continual achievement of taste by looking at the “doings”. More specifically, taste regimes are composed of practices of problematisation, ritualisation and instrumentalisation, which in turn gain specificity through compliance to normative systems (Arsel and Bean 2013). What is important to take from this study is the idea that practices that in a first instance may seem unrelated to one another, should be examined for “recognizable and repeatable patterns” (902), which are orchestrated by the regime underlying the practice. In other words, if a taste regime is the glue that holds practices together, any empirical work on tastes should be looking to trace the normative system that dictates which practices are acceptable and which should be rejected as unsuitable and ill-suited.

4. The Silent Partner: On the Importance of Distaste

Distaste is a research domain that has attracted less attention from scholars compared to its positive counterpart, yet one which could potentially be revealing, primarily because rejection is more determining in drawing social distinctions (Wilk 1997). The reason the construct has remained relatively underresearched is presumably its invisible nature, which renders dislikes difficult to be displayed in public (e.g. someone may display a preference for jazz, but that doesn't say much about his or her taste in other genres). The construct has been defined by Bourdieu (1984) as refusal of the taste of others and it constitutes a constant, yet silent, partner to our choices and preferences since one's taste "starts with the comparison with others' tastes" (Hennion 2004, 135). Distaste is intrinsically bound to relational oppositions and subtly implies a competitive relationship amongst cultures displaying different preferences. Douglas (1996) in particular takes an extreme stance by arguing that cultures, which are the "arbiter of taste" (80), are at all times "accusing" all other, competing cultures, declaring in the process their commitment to a particular cultural stance. Similarly, Bourdieu recognises the hostility that delineates heterogeneous tastes by arguing that "tastes (i.e. manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference. It is no accident that, when they have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes. In matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation, and tastes are perhaps most and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance ("sick making") of the tastes of others" (56). From this standpoint, it can be argued that the distinction between taste and distaste is practically non-existent, since one constitutes a reflection of the other. This project is preoccupied with distaste just as much as it is with taste-making and this chapter is aiming to provide a better understanding of rejection and setting up a research agenda with regards to boundary-making.

A significant point of criticism that arises with respect to the dialectic of tastes and distastes is their treatment as binary opposites. Douglas (1966), for example, in her analysis of the relativity of what is considered as "dirt" in different societies, argues that symbolic boundary making is achieved by drawing the line between what is pure and

what is dirty, in a sense that anything outside a particular system of perceptions is considered disordered and will be condemned. Such a classification system, however, is only addressing concepts that are diametrically antithetical to one another (e.g. the vulgar and the refined), and despite it being easy to grasp by painting a clear picture of how each society classifies artefacts, this perspective ignores the wide range of possibilities that may exist in between. Rejecting the binary relationship between tastes and distastes, Wilk (1997) attempts to demonstrate that individuals may be driven by a range of emotions, from dislikes to utter disgust. His work identifies four ways in which people may place boundaries through the use of (dis)tastes. Firstly, the more straightforward strategies of “us versus them” may be employed through simple exhibition of likes and dislikes, e.g. we all love wine or we all hate beer. Secondly, exclusion of others is also possible on the basis of not sharing similar tastes (e.g. they don’t appreciate wine) or of not sharing similar distastes (e.g. they like beer). In sum, Wilk rejects the idea of tastes forming perfect oppositions and suggests that the relationship between the two is far more complex.

A second point of clarification concerns the conceptualisation of (dis)tastes as collectively –as opposed to individually- performed. Taking into account the instability of meanings which are necessarily bound to social interaction (Berger and Luckmann 1967), for this project it is assumed that consumption cannot be understood as individual choices, for it is the basic choice of the type of society and culture that one wishes to live in that will subsequently define one’s preferences (Douglas 1996). Explaining the relationship between culture of belonging and preference for and rejection of objects, Douglas suggests that “commodities are chosen because they are not neutral; they are chosen because they would not be tolerated in the rejected forms of society and are therefore permissible in the preferred form. Hostility is implicit in their selection” (81). From this standpoint, one’s taste for commodities is mediated through participation in a particular culture and signifies the actor’s belonging to that culture and his or her non-membership in all competing ones.

Having clarified the foundations of the approach that this study is taking towards distaste, the next sections aim to address shortfalls of recent conceptualisations. Aside from distaste’s reductionist treatment as a binary opposite to its positive counterpart, the construct has been incorporated in static models in the fields of social psychology and

consumer research, where individuals are portrayed as rejecting behaviours exhibited by dissociative groups or stereotyped others. However, such theorisations treat the concept as taken for granted and do not account for the manner in which dislikes are not solely driven by outgroup behaviour, but are instead constantly negotiated amongst members of a social group. Finally, it has been argued that distastes can in some cases be inconspicuous and innocent of social consequences. Despite this argument having validity in certain contexts, it is argued that the current understanding of the distinction between conspicuous distaste and unassuming rejection is only partial. The chapter takes a closer look at these approaches, starting from negative symbolic consumption and subsequently examining the application of social identity theory in consumer research.

4.1 “Us versus Them”: Boundary-Making and Negative Symbolic Consumption

Consumer research has examined distaste within the scholarship of negative symbolic consumption. Empirical work has explored the construct primarily at the level of the self, meaning that an actor's likes and dislikes help him/her achieve his/her ideal self or avoid the undesired self. Negative symbolic consumption is divided in non-choice (usually inconspicuous and is due to affordability, availability or accessibility reasons) and anti-choice (commonly related to abandonment, avoidance or aversion behaviour) (Hogg 1998; Hogg et al. 2009), which may be related to whole product categories or specific brands with the purpose of avoiding undesired identities (Ogilvie 1987; Wilk 1994; 1997; Hogg 1998; Hogg and Banister 2001; Banister and Hogg 2004).

The coordinates for what constitutes a desired or undesired identity, and by extension which tastes should be rejected as well as which are deemed as appropriate, are said to be provided by reference groups (Simmel 1955; Hogg 1998; Hogg, Banister and Stephenson 2009). The term was conceived by Hyman (1942) decades ago and has since appeared in various studies and taken multiple forms (e.g. dissociative others, avoidance groups, outgroups and stereotyped collectives). Consequently, its definition varies significantly. A common usage, however, is that a reference group constitutes that which serves as a point of reference in making comparisons and forming judgments about one's self or group (Shibutani 1955). This frame of reference can have both

positive and negative connotations, in the sense that such a group can be both a collective that one aspires for membership of or one to avoid.

Reference groups constitute the cornerstone of social identity theory. Originally formulated by Tajfel and Turner (1979, 1986), this theory attempts to explain the relationship between the self and social categorisation by suggesting that intergroup behaviour, in other words behaviour of an actor that is based on the actor's identification of themselves as belonging to a particular social group, overtakes interpersonal behaviour determined by individual characteristics. Social identity theory focuses on intergroup conflict, arguing that individuals who are members of opposing groups will behave in competition to each other as their respective group membership dictates. Competition amongst groups is not only present when conflict of interest occurs, since the mere existence of an outgroup is sufficient to provoke it (Tajfel and Turner 1979), but later research suggests that it will only concern dimensions that provide a meaningful basis for self-other definition (Reynolds, Turner and Haslam 2000). Therefore, a group is perceived as a collection of individuals who share a "common definition of themselves" and consensus over the "evaluation of their group and membership of it" (1979, 40).

Consumer research with the help of social psychology has well established the relationships between tastes and social groups, the main argument being that individuals develop tastes consistent with their membership groups or ingroups and adopt habits consonant with their aspirational groups, in order to realise their desired identities. For example, Muniz and Hamer (2001) demonstrate how consumers actively avoid particular brands through rivalries with the consumer group that is loyal to those brands, while Bearden and Etzel (1982) demonstrate how reference group influence varies depending on whether the tastes in question refer to luxury or everyday goods and whether use of such goods is public or private. Antithetically, distastes are developed when consumers are acting in specific ways in order to avoid outgroup membership (Escalas and Bettman 2005), which is based on the idea that dislikes are especially developed when individuals relate specific preferences to groups that they do not wish to be associated with. In other words, the point of reference for distastes is usually stereotyped collectives, with the degree of coherence and stability of these collectives varied (e.g. from nationality [White and Dahl 2007] and occupation [Hogg 1998], to a

fan subculture [Banister et al. 2005]). White and Dhal (2007) extend this view by arguing that it is not just any outgroup that individuals will try to avoid, but rather dissociative reference groups, in particular, that will most strongly influence negative consumption. It is further argued that when ingroup identity is stronger, individuals are even more motivated to refuse tastes of dissociative reference groups (e.g. White and Dhal (2007) give the example of Canadians expressing distaste towards elements associated with American identity) and that competition is more intense amongst collectives that are closer in social space. The importance of distaste in drawing symbolic boundaries is best exhibited by Wilk (1994), whose work demonstrates that negative consumption is a much more effective means of signalling identity, for it expresses a level of commitment to one's ingroup far stronger to what can be achieved simply by exhibiting similar tastes.

The underlying principles of the above mentioned studies is that rejection of tastes by members of the ingroup occurs to make sure that others understand where the group stands in the social space, in relation to the external and often competitive "them" (Berger and Heath 2008). However, research shows that the distinction between "their tastes" and "ours" is not always straightforward. In a more complicated case, Arsel and Thompson (2010) explore how the indie field of consumption gets contaminated by the hipster myth. In this case, respondents often had to assert their identity against outgroups through the use of the same or similar products and services and it was differentiation of the practices and manner of consuming that could distinguish these consumers from outsiders. From this standpoint, distaste against practices of outgroups was mirrored in the appropriation of tastes by the ingroup, which provides further evidence to the argument that theorisation of conspicuous distaste as anti-choice is not always relevant and that the treatment of ingroup tastes as a mere opposite to the tastes of others may be underestimating the complexities of boundary making.

Finally, the invisibility of the construct has led to arguments over its inconspicuous properties, since studies have demonstrated that anti-choice can also be used as a "play safe" strategy. That is, Banister and Hogg (2004) argue that consumers who use avoidance as a primary drive for their consumption may do so to remain inconspicuous and safe. This may be preferred to using taste as a way to signify an identity and thereby running the risk of "getting it wrong". By contrast, the inconspicuousness of distaste is a

view that is completely dismissed in Douglas's (1996) work, which, as discussed earlier, reads all artefacts for their evident meanings, solely. This researcher posits that if the idea that anti-choice may indeed on occasion be a "play safe" strategy is to be accepted, then the literature lacks insights as to when the exhibiting of distaste is conspicuous, thus signifying non-compliance with the profile of the user that is normally associated to the object or practice in question, and when it is unassuming.

4.2 Towards a Dynamic Conceptualisation of Distaste

The problem with conceptualising distaste in relation to dissociative outgroups manifests itself in a two fold way. First, there is currently no framework of understanding as to who constitutes an avoidance group for a collective and consequently as to what provides the coordinates for what is rejected. Secondly, to say that distaste is refusal of the tastes of outgroups portrays the concept as oppositional without providing a rationale behind this opposition. Understanding underlying rejection behaviour, however, is crucial in explaining how distaste is formed and how it is subtly present in the performance of taste as "that which is out of place" (Douglas 1966).

Even though anti-choice (Hogg 1998) is an organised way to explore nets of distaste, the problem of volatile cultural frameworks calls for an analysis not only of objects or services that are rejected, but rather of the understanding underlying such decisions. In other words, since the meanings of consumption objects are unstable and depend on interpretations given by their appropriators (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998), what is necessary in the study of taste-making is a relativist approach that explains the logic behind disassociating with products, services and social groups, as well as the logic of the specific field.

The importance of switching the focus from the object of rejection to the understanding underlying avoidance behaviour is imposed by another factor as well. That is, Banister and Hogg's (2004) argument over the non-conspicuous aspects of non-choice, is in direct opposition to Douglas's (1996, 25) view that "any choosing 'for' is also choosing 'against'", for as it was established earlier, a choice for an object over

another may be related to a multiplicity of reasons: practicalities, availability, and habit to name a few. This raises an important question: under what circumstance is the non-choice of products conspicuous? Contrasts and juxtapositions that actors use to justify their consumption choices are not necessarily triggered by the object itself, but by what the practice of using it represents. Despite actors expressing their dislikes towards “this” or “that” product or brand in their everyday narratives, it is the meanings associated with a particular practice that provoke disgust. While this argument states the obvious for any social constructionist, it has significant implications for this study of distaste in relation to our ability to distinguish between conspicuous and inconspicuous non-choice. To give an example, in justifying their preference for complementary (as opposed to Western) medicine, Douglas’s (1996) respondents rather than providing evidence of how the former worked better for them, or indicating where the latter failed them, concentrated on stating the negative associations that they held for Western medicine – i.e. materiality, physicality and violence - as the reasons behind their rejection (25).

From this standpoint, in understanding non-choice the ideology lurking behind rejection behaviour and potential “patterns” underlying an actor’s positive choices that could potentially be revealing are being sought. As such, Arsel and Bean’s (2013) approach to taste as a “regime” that directs practice revises the “rejection of the taste of others” conceptualisation implied in social identity theory and negative symbolic consumption, by placing the focus of the research on the pattern that consumers are trying to maintain when certain types of choices are consistently excluded from their consumption. In identifying such patterns, the dimensions used for comparisons and juxtapositions are key to understanding the underlying ideology behind disgust.

To sum up, from the arguments expressed here so far, the construct of distaste has the potential to provide robust insights when it comes to taste-making and the drawing of symbolic boundaries. However, existing conceptualisations of it fall short in treating collective distaste as passive rejection, a mere binary opposite to the tastes of “them”. In addition to this, there is currently no framework of understanding as to when non-choice is conspicuous and when it is not. Ultimately, it is believed here that current models of rejection behaviour are static. Consequently, the approach of this study is to be different: instead of treating the concept as taken for granted, the aim is to elicit the

manner in which dislikes are constantly co-created amongst members of social groups as part of the taste-making process. Such negotiations concern not only which tastes of “them” should be rejected, but also how external practices can be appropriated in a ways that are in line with the group’s normative system. Ultimately, the question that remains to be answered is: How do members of collectives maintain the boundaries that distinguish them from dissimilar others?

At this stage an important point arises. As exhibited throughout this chapter and as Douglas (1996) points out, it has been well established that cultures are inherently in conflict since they all represent a different way of thinking about the world. Perhaps the focus has so far been on such conflicts due to the clarity of the “us versus them” principle, which is easy to grasp and provides an instant snapshot of where groups stand in relation to one another in the social space. In this study, the juxtaposition of practices with “them” are considered to be of great significance in collective taste-making; however, it is believed that previous studies have underestimated the complexities of taste-making generated purely from engagement in group practices and interaction amongst members. From this standpoint, and taking into account the preoccupation of this work with the micro-social level of interaction, it is deemed that taste conflicts and disputes do not solely occur amongst cultures but also *within* them. To explore the issue further, the next chapter first takes a look at the importance of the collective as a unit of analysis in consumer research and subsequently probes how communities of practice, in particular, constitute a valuable framework of inquiry.

5. Consumer Research and Community

The term “community” has been a matter of debate, resulting in so many definitions that in the words of Halsey its meaning ends up being meaningless (Crow and Allen 1994). In daily life, “community” can refer to anything from a group of individuals with unifying traits or interests, common characteristics and shared activities through to any interacting population. In consumer research, the tendency of analysing consumer culture by examining consumption collectives rather than individuals, has brought different types of communities to the forefront of studies. Such an inclination goes hand in hand with the idea that the development of self-identity is always dependent on the development of collective identity (Elliott 2004) and that the meaning of market offerings is socially constituted, being only significant when it exists as shared social knowledge within cultural groups (Berger and Luckmann 1967). From this standpoint, consumption communities have attracted the interest of researchers in terms of the capacity of their members to operate as active co-creators of the meanings of those products and services that are used to facilitate the existence of the collective and the sense of belongingness of its members (Pongsakornrungrungsilp and Schroeder 2011). Communities have been studied for their ability to develop practices through repetition, including the creation and sharing of myths and meanings (Pongsakornrungrungsilp and Schroeder 2011), the nurturing of value systems, codes and principles (Schroeder 2009), the development of rituals, traditions and shared consciousness (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001) and the development of internal structures and ethos (Schouten and McAlexander 1996). The role of members in these processes varies depending on their expertise and length of participation (Pongsakornrungrungsilp and Schroeder 2011), but the transformative powers of being part of the group affect all within.

Particularly in relation to taste, Woodward and Emmison (2001) state that the “socialness” of taste judgements has not received the attention it deserves from scholars (296). Their findings demonstrate that people tend to use “notions of collective ideals and interpersonal norms” (305) in order to distinguish the tasteful from the distasteful. Yet, despite the academic community recognising that tastes operate in a communal way, as indicated in the previous chapters research has mainly focused on how

individuals define their tastes in relation to collectives, setting aside any discussions about how *collective* tastes are formed and sustained. This chapter discusses works on different types of communities which, while not explicitly about taste can be “read” for their reliance on the construct. It subsequently incorporates works on taste discussed in the previous chapters to further define the research gap.

Communities have been encountered in multiple forms within consumer research literature, all indicating differences in the coherence and lifespan of the group as well as the degree of commitment of its members. Consumption collectives can be formed around admiration of a particular brand experience (i.e. Kozinets 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001) or around common interests, in which case the use of particular brands facilitates bonding amongst members by creating “linking value” (Cova 1997; Cova and Cova 2002; Goulding et al. 2002). The chapter begins with a brief overview of four important, yet significantly different types of such collectives, namely subcultures, brand communities, neo-tribes and taste cultures, even though as Cova and Pace (2006, 1088) point out, “it is impossible to say whether any consensus exists regarding these proposed differentiations”.

Subcultures constitute subdivisions of national culture (Gordon 1947) and their analysis has its roots in cultural studies. Typically, a subculture is seen as subordinate group with its own expressive forms and rituals (Hebdige [1979] 2002), usually encompassing some form of deviant behaviour, ranging from violence (Cohen 1955) to simply being an outsider, in other words, exhibiting behaviour that is outside of the mainstream (Becker [1963] 1997). The subculture is treated by its members as a new frame of reference and a new status system (Cohen 1955), within which members are given the chance to build a new identity. As such, subcultures are primarily countercultures, subverting dominant institutions, such as the family (i.e. Jefferson 1993) or school (i.e. Willis 1977). From a consumer research point of view, subcultures can infuse brands with countercultural meanings central to the value and appeal of the brand in question (for example, the Harley Davidson image of the “outlaw biker” contributes to the myth of the Harley Davidson brand (Holt 2004)). Critics of subcultures, however, argue that the term fails to demonstrate the complexity and diversity of consumption collectives, which have “fragmented to the point where there

is no longer an identifiable subgroup sharing a common interest” (Cherrier and Murray 2006, 81).

Brand communities and neo-tribes refer to collectives that unlike subcultures do not exist as deviant or alternative to the mainstream (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001). Their emergence is attributed to a liberation from social bonds (Cova and Cova 2002) that occurred as a result of the liberatory postmodernist era (Firat and Venkatesh 1995) that privileges individual agency by allowing actors to be “whatever they wish to be”. More specifically, Muniz and O’Guinn (2001, 412), drawing upon cultural studies of fandom (fan communities), define brand communities as “a specialised, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of the brand”. In this case, the emergence of the collective is attributed to the symbolic value of the brand, which unites individuals with a shared consciousness and lifestyle differentiation. Brand communities can range from relatively autonomous consumer initiatives (e.g. Cova and Pace 2006) to co-constructed activities between the company and its fans (e.g. McAlexander and Schouten 1998).

Tribes, on the other hand, constitute a more unstable, temporary and transient form of collective (Canniford 2011) in comparison to both subcultures and brand communities. They are “characterised by fluidity, occasional gathering and dispersal” (Maffesoli 1996, 76) and are born out of shared emotions, passions or interests (Cova and Cova 2002). Their boundaries can be as vague as that of a “cool” tribe (Nancarrow and Nancarrow 2007) or as wide as that of British Royal Family fans (Otnes and Maclaran 2007). From a consumer research point of view, Cova (1997) and Cova and Cova (2002) have argued that consumers value goods and services which allow and facilitate social interaction, enhance the bonds amongst tribe members and give individuals a stronger sense of identification through the “linking value” that they can generate. Complying with the principles of postmodernism however, these communities are volatile and constantly form, disappear and reform into different organisations. It is precisely their fragmented and elusive nature that has led to criticism that if everything can be considered a neo-tribe (Cherrier and Murray 2006), then perhaps the explanatory power of the concept is diminished.

Finally, another considerably wide, vague and volatile type of collective is taste cultures. Similarly to neo-tribes, taste cultures are invisible and difficult to define and their nature is temporary. Gans (1999) defines them as unorganized aggregates of people sharing common aesthetic values and standards of taste. Distinguishing between “taste cultures” and “taste publics”, he argues that “taste cultures are not cohesive value systems, and taste publics are not organized groups; the former are aggregates of similar values and usually but not always similar content, and the latter are aggregates of people with usually but not always similar values making similar choices from the available offerings of culture. (...) at times people who make up a taste culture do act as a group” (94). As such, when conditions are met, taste culture publics can strengthen their bond and organisation to constitute one of the more distinguishable types of communities discussed above. For example, in her work on dance cultures, Thornton (1995) demonstrates how members sharing common tastes in a particular practice (in this case music and dance), also exhibited preferences towards the same media as well as liking to spend their time with individuals who had similar tastes to themselves, while similarly, Goulding et al. (2002) discuss how rave taste cultures have come together in the context of dance clubs.

5.1 From Inter to Intra Group Conflict

Reviewing the literature on marketplace cultures (Arnould and Thompson 2005) in order to explore how communities use the competitive “them” in their collective boundary-making, it can be observed that members of such collectives are active producers of meanings that are often juxtaposed to external practices in an attempt to enforce and maintain symbolic distinctions. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) in their study of the bikers subculture state that “virtually every biker identifies strongly with the motorcycle as a symbol of freedom that contrasts starkly with the automobile (“cage” or “coffin” in biker vernacular) as a symbol of confinement” (51). Juxtapositions with a stereotyped profile of car drivers were also used in multiple Harley Davidson adverts: a pair of hands in cuffs pictured on a car wheel, a Harley Davidson driving away while in the mirror of the motorcycle the audience can see a hectic family life being left behind, are two of many examples that aim to put forward and contrast the image of the free and rebellious motorcycle driver. The comparison

between group practices is also touched upon by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), who emphasize the competitive spirit underlying the relationship between brand communities, while Kozinets (2002) demonstrates the conspicuous contrasts that Burning Man participants have been making between their festival and organisations like Disneyland and Woodstock. Finally, market imposed juxtapositions between the commercial and the sacred can be observed in Kozinets's (2001) study of the Star Trek fandom. From this standpoint, while not necessarily dealing explicitly with taste-related issues, these studies can be "read" for their reliance on the "Us versus Them" principle.

While this framing is indisputably valuable for the understanding of how collectives draw symbolic inter-group boundaries, an underlying principle that is deemed paradoxical in these studies is the treatment of collective tastes as homogenous units that stands in opposition to those of others. The persistent treatment of communities as unified wholes has not gone unnoticed by researchers. For instance, Chalmers et al. (2013, 1011) point out that "traditionally, research on community has been dominated by a perspective that privileges the homogeneity of groups", while Martin (1992) also contends that research has so far focused on the unifying characteristics of collectives. Indeed, a closer observation in the literature reveals heterogeneous characteristics amongst members of groups that lead to different "readings" of texts, deviating attributions of meanings to practices and ultimately divergent views on collective taste-making. For example, going back to the Harley Davidson case, Schouten et al. (2007) state that while women members of the subculture claimed similar values to men, i.e. freedom and machismo, they defined and expressed these very differently. In fact, multiple authors acknowledge the existence of intra-group differences: Beverland et al. (2010) point out the diversity of identity goals sought from membership amongst members of the surfer, snowboarder and skater collectives, Fischer et al. (1996) bring attention to the utopian view of community as an expression of human solidarity, while DeValck (2007) argues that "real" communities have to deal with and resolve conflict, focusing her work on the tensions that occur within virtual communities. However, despite the recognition that intra-group tensions significantly affect the practices of consumption collectives, little is still known about how intra group dynamics impact upon the development of communities in general and taste-making practices, in particular. To help in understanding of how inter-group practice juxtapositions, as well as discrepancies of opinions as to what constitutes "good taste" internal to the group are

negotiated by members in the taste-making process, the next section introduces the communities of practice framework, which will constitute the unit of analysis of this project.

5.2 What Are Communities of Practice?

While communities of practice have been around for centuries, they only started attracting academic interest in the past three decades, primarily as a theory of learning (Lave and Wenger 1991) and subsequently as part of the field of knowledge management within organisation studies. Despite the fact that they have remained relatively underresearched within the field of consumer research, there is no denying that consumer groups organised around various domains (i.e. hobbies, travel, musical interests, fashions etc.) all constitute communities of practice. Communities of practice are everywhere and can be as diverse as the driver that gives rise to them (Wenger and Snyder 2000b). Wenger and Snyder (2000b), in particular, adopt a flexible definition and argue that they can be small or large, long or short lived, collocated or distributed, spontaneous or intentional, unrecognised or institutionalised, with an explicit or vague agenda, meeting regularly or rarely, and that such communities organise themselves informally by setting their own agendas and developing their own leadership. Definitions, however, vary significantly, with other scholars arguing that communities of practice can only refer to tightly knit groups that have been practising together for long enough to develop relations of mutuality and a cohesive identity (Lindkvist 2005, 1189). As such, the term is to a great extent ambiguous and still evolving.

For the purposes of this project, the widely accepted definition proposed by communities of practice veteran Etienne Wenger will be used. He argues that a community of practice is defined as a group of people pursuing common interests by using a shared repertoire of resources (Wenger 1998) and through mutual engagement with shared repertoires members negotiate a joint enterprise which brings coherence to the community and directs its practices. Negotiation of this common purpose is not just a stated goal, but more importantly, creates a sense of accountability amongst members that ultimately shapes the group, or as Elliott (2004) argues, is the practice of meaning negotiation necessary for mutual engagement which constitutes the community.

Under this optic, communities of practice are not all that different from the types of collectives presented above. They too represent groups of people brought together by a shared passion; however, unlike brand communities and subcultures the emphasis is placed on the social relations amongst members rather than on the object of consumption (Goulding et al. 2013) and unlike neo-tribes, the communities of practice framework can also accommodate collectives of a more stable and organised nature. Given that communities of practice started off as a learning theory, the focus of the framework is on how interaction deepens members' knowledge and expertise on a particular area (Wenger et al. 2002). In an attempt to take advantage of this "learning orientation" and taking into account that social distinctions, to a great extent, run on knowledge (i.e. cultural capital), the framework provides a lens for the studying of how socially significant knowledge is shared, managed and disseminated in the making of taste. As such, similarly to Goulding et al. (2013), it is believed that to understand collective taste making it is necessary, first, to look at how participation in a group enables the learning and negotiation processes that underlie what is deemed to be "fitting" the community of practitioners and is thus acceptable, and what should be rejected. In fact, it is the value of "learning together" that brings members of such communities closer, thereby contributing in the development of a unique perspective on their interest and consequently common practices and approaches (Wenger et al. 2002), which distinguish the group from its dissimilar others in an "Us versus Them" fashion.

Next, I take a closer look at the key interconnected elements that comprise a community of practice.

5.2.1 Joint Enterprise/Doxa

A community's joint enterprise is one of the main sources of coherence that binds the group together, which does not merely refer to a stated goal but rather to a collective process of negotiation that mirrors the complexities of engaging in that collective (Wenger 1998). As such, in trying to identify a community's common purpose it is important to remember that scholars should not be on the lookout for a static agreement but for a continuous process, for as Wenger (1998, 77) remarks, a joint enterprise is

defined “in the very process of pursuing it”. Defining a joint enterprise requires the combination of engagement (i.e. what are the opportunities to negotiate?), imagination (i.e. what vision do members have of the community?) and alignment (i.e. how widely do members subscribe to a shared purpose?) (Wenger et al. 2000a).

The formation of a commonly acceptable purpose becomes an important concern, since it is about determining, interpreting and negotiating the group’s position in a social space (who we are) and the ways it differentiates itself from dissociative others (what we do). However, defining “who we are” is neither a straightforward affair nor a definitive one as communities of practice are communities in process (Wenger 1998). In addition to this, as Handley et al. (2006, 642) argue “richness of context within which communities exist generates fluidity and heterogeneity which belies the idealization of communities as “cohesive, homogenous “social objects””. From this standpoint, members who come from different backgrounds, i.e. occupation, political stance, interests etc., tend to develop their own unique patterns of “thought words”, underlying logics and narratives, which inevitably affect their participation stance, appreciation of other people’s roles and contributions as well as their perceptions as to what the common mission should be (Hong and O 2009). As such, a joint enterprise is “joint” not because it implies the unconditional agreement of members in any simple sense but because it is communally negotiated.

From this perspective, a joint enterprise does bear a number of similarities to the concept of “consciousness of kind”, an implicit basis for community according to Gusfield (1975) and the most important element of brand communities, as recognised by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001). Similarities are to be traced in that both terms imply a shared knowing of belonging. However, while common consciousness also assumes a common way of thinking about things, joint enterprise accounts instead for members’ varying “thought worlds” that make negotiations of the manner in which the group operates a constant and necessary process.

A joint enterprise also necessarily entails a set of “rules of the game” that are shared as a common understanding amongst members and constitute the community’s doxa ([1977] 2002) in Bourdieusian terms. Paraphrasing Bourdieu ([1977] 2002, 37), doxa is the universe of tacit presuppositions that organise action within the group. These

(informal) rules exercise a limiting influence on the potential courses of action for members, insofar as they agree that the community's joint enterprises are worth pursuing. Bourdieu uses the term to denote what is taken for granted in a particular society, that which "goes without saying because it comes without saying" ([1977] 2002, 167). From this standpoint, it is the community's doxa that prevents members from particular choices or ways of doing things. This collective conscious (used here as specific to the community rather than in Durkheimian terms to the entire society) defines what is allowed and what is not: certain cultural artefacts and ways of doing things are recognized by the underpinning doxa as being inappropriate to a particular social position, hence helping to maintain symbolic boundaries, the "sense of the community's place", and members' sense of belonging, by excluding that which is "not for us".

Specific to this research, the term joint enterprise is used to refer to (a) the pursuit or object of practice of a community (i.e. what we do), (b) the normative system or ideology that underlies that practice (i.e. why we do it and according to what values and principles) and (c) the "doings" of members (i.e. how we do it). The commonly accepted particles of these features of the joint enterprise are referred to as the doxa.

5.2.2 Participation

Participation refers both to action taken within the group and relationships and connections amongst members of the community and as Wenger (1998) argues it is not only personal but perhaps even more importantly social. As such, participation is characterised by the mutual ability of members to negotiate meanings amongst them and influence each other's experiences of meaning, even though, as will be discussed, below this mutuality does not necessarily entail equality or similar levels of authority. By taking part, members develop a sense of belonging to the group, therefore participation does not merely refer to temporal engagement, but to active participation in the practices and construction of a common identity (Wenger 1998). "Through participation individuals engage with tools, language, role definitions and other artefacts as well as implicit relations, tacit conventions and underlying assumptions and values" (Gherardi 2009, 645).

Given the interest of this researcher in distaste and rejection, it is worth mentioning that participation in a particular community of practice is significant for the group's identity, because it always signifies the non-participation of its members in other groups. In addressing the matter, Wenger (1998, 168-170) argues "each side is defined by opposition to the other and membership in one community implies marginalisation in another" and continues, "a significant amount of their (members) communal energy goes into making their time in the community a liveable realization of their marginality to the outside world. Non-participation (in external activities) becomes an active aspect of their practice (....) The subtle cultivation of non-participation is not something they talk much about but it's in the air - a tacitly shared understanding (...) it manifests in remarks, conversations, in the way they behave etc". Following the above and paraphrasing Wenger (1998), rejection of participation in outgroups can become reified in one's own community and constitute an integral part of members' practices.

It comes as no surprise that communities of practice invite different levels of participation. To an extent this is due to the idea that different members participate in the community for different reasons and have different expectations of it. Wenger et al. (2002), in particular, contend that there are three main levels of participation: a small core group of very active members who inevitably take on leadership roles, an equally small group of marginal active participants who are regularly involved but lack the intensity of the core group and finally a larger group of peripheral members who keep to the sidelines. The reasons that members remain on the periphery can vary significantly, ranging from their inability to commit more time to the group through to their lack of authority. Participants may also choose to adopt a peripheral role to avoid personal identity conflicts or to adapt their practice in ways which retain a continued sense of existential integrity, whilst still notionally fitting in with the community norms (Handley et al. 2006). Periphery members, as Wenger et al. (2002) explain, are not any less valuable than the core and active groups, for they still participate and learn in their own ways and pace.

Given the different levels of participation occurring in communities, as well as variations in the authority that members carry, there is a need to untangle the power differentials that enable dominant members to pursue their enterprises at the expense of

those occupying a marginal position, through the control and manipulation of community resources as well as rhetorical and interpersonal devices (Coopey 1995; Coopey and Burgoyne 2000). That is, when studying heterogeneity within communities, it is necessary to take into account how the more powerful individuals can dictate how and to what extent participants with inferior power are given access to contribute fully to the sociocultural practices performed by the community. New participants may also be denied power by full members, especially if the latter threaten to transform the knowledge and practices which are important to members who have invested in it (Carlile 2004). Particularly in taste-making, levels of participation and different members' perception of "tastefulness" "are critical to the ways in which individuals: internalise, challenge, or reject existing practices of the community" (Handley et al. 2006, 644) and consequently to the manner by which collective taste is negotiated.

5.2.3 Learning and Knowledge

The importance of learning on the path towards becoming a practitioner of a particular community was brought to the forefront of consumer research by Goulding et al. (2013). As was mentioned earlier, communities of practice were first introduced as a learning theory by Lave and Wenger (1991), with the aim of highlighting the importance of context when discussing learning processes, as well as the tacit nature of knowledge. According to this framework, a community of practice is the context in which individuals develop practices and identities appropriate to that community. The main argument behind this proposition is that knowledge is taking place in the place that it is applied and for this reason it is to a great extent embedded and tacit. In contrast to theories of socialization, which predict the smooth reproduction of communities over time, the so called "situated learning" approach calls for attention to the possibilities for variation and even intra-community conflict that need to be negotiated and reconciled, at least in part (Handley et al. 2006, 642).

Knowledge that is tacit and embedded is still exchangeable and accessible through interaction amongst members, including conversations, storytelling and even observations of the core and active groups or apprenticeships with those most experienced (Wenger et al. 2002). Its character is primarily social, because members

need one another in order to develop, complement and even scrutinize their expertise in a particular domain. Most importantly, knowledge is dynamic and constantly in motion, which is not to say that a domain of knowledge does not have a stable core (a form of field doxa in other words). In fact, this core base is essential in securing the formation of a community of practice. However beyond that core, knowledge is constantly updated to follow evolutions in the domain and negotiate the relative position and status of the community in that field.

Throughout the collective process of negotiation of this position, which is primarily mirrored in the group's joint enterprise, learning takes place both as accumulation of skills and knowledge and as a process of becoming. Wenger (1998, 215), in particular, claims that skills and information developed and employed inside the community "are not abstract as ends in themselves, but in the service of an identity" and a process of "becoming a certain person or conversely, to avoid becoming a certain person".

Within the context of a community, learning particularly affects three dimensions of practice: discovering how to engage mutually (i.e. who is good at what, who is easy or hard to get along with), tuning the joint enterprise (including how to reconcile conflicting views of what the community's purpose is) and developing repertoires, styles and discourses (i.e. telling stories, renegotiating the meanings of elements etc.) (Wenger 1998, 95). As such, it is not just knowledge that is exchanged through learning processes but the very process of engaging in a community and co-creating its practices.

For the purposes of this project, learning within communities of practice is a useful process to study, because it emphasizes the sociocultural dynamics of being part of a collective. That is, learning how to become a "taster" involves mastering the field as well as understanding how to operate in accordance with collective norms. "To know is to be capable of participating with the requisite competence in the complex web of relationships among people and activities" (Gherardi, 1998, 274). As such, taste-making is not the result of a mere process of doing things together, but entails the exchange of knowledge amongst members of different participation status who collectively attempt to negotiate a joint enterprise that establishes the community's presence within a field.

5.2.4 Practice

Collective learning results in practices that reflect the pursuit of the community's joint enterprise. As such, the concept of "practice" in itself is inevitably of great importance. As an analytic concept, it allows for the interpretation of how people achieve active being in the world (Gherardi 2009) or as Brown and Duguid (2001, 203) suggest "by practice we mean (...) undertaking or engaging fully in a task, job or profession". Practice is always social practice (Wenger 1998) and is about *doing* in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do. Reckwitz (2002, 242) defines practice as "a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, "things" and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge". On a similar note, practice in this research does not stand for "action", but rather, for a coordinated way of thinking about, doing and saying things. A practice is thus a way of understanding the world and acting within it. More specifically, at a mental (intangible) level, practices affect the mind (e.g. ways of understanding the world, knowing how to carry out an activity) and knowledge (not mere information but ways of understanding, wanting and feeling, which are not solely understood by the individual but are collective), while at a physical (tangible) level they include the body (e.g. bodily performances) and language (e.g. discursive practices, signs and communication). All elements of practices are interconnected and reproduced through routinisation and repertoires.

What is often forgotten when discussing consumption collectives is the idea that while practices may get to some extent routinized, they never remain stable or static as practitioners are constantly appraising their performances and working practices in order to refine them. As Wenger et al. (2002, 39) argue, "an effective practice evolves with the community as a collective product". A practice is only recognisable in relation to its intersubjectively created meanings and this is precisely why taste as a regime (Arsel and Bean 2013) endows meaning to "sayings" and "doings" as well as directing their appraisal. One can argue that practices are under constant appraisal and refinement, because they develop as a response to ever changing field conditions and field actors, even though in many cases they may not transcend the community boundaries or transform the environmental conditions in any dramatic fashion. From

this standpoint, taste is performed as a collective, situated activity within practice, learnt and taught as part of becoming a practitioner and involves the continual negotiation of aesthetic categories along with what is thought to be the “correct” or “incorrect” way of practising.

5.2.5 Domain/Field

Referring to the sphere of influence of communities of practice, I have used interchangeably the terms “domain” and “field” in reviewing the literature. While the two have significant similarities – perhaps due to the fact that they are both rather ill-defined - it should be noted that they have very dissimilar origins, thus having contributed to the development of theories unconnected to one another. Most importantly, the “intention” behind the two terms is different, as the first is meant to define the boundaries within which communities of practice operate and their “raison d’être”, whereas the latter aims to establish the boundaries of field-specific knowledge and practice, in which actors compete for status. While it is not clear how one can identify the activities that give rise to a domain or field, what is true of both terms is that the meaning of practice, which may seem trivial to anyone outside, may be of grave significance to the practitioners within.

More specifically, situated learning theory has used the term “domain” to refer to the setting of the scene and rules within which communities of practice operate, for “Without commitment to the domain, a community is just a group of friends” (Wenger et al. 2002, 30). The specificity of a domain can vary significantly from something mundane, like staying in good shape, to a professional practice with an established discourse. Knowing the boundaries of the domain enables members not only to decide what is worth pursuing and how to present ideas, but also creates a sense of accountability to a body of knowledge and following on from this the development of tastes and practices (Wenger et al. 2002).

On the other hand, the term “field” has been linked to the works of Pierre Bourdieu, to indicate the various spheres within which actors compete for social distinction. In defining the term, Warde (2004:12), drawing upon Bourdieu (1992), contends that “a

field is a relatively autonomous structured domain or space, which has been socially instituted, thus having a definable but contingent history of development. One condition of emergence of a field is that agents recognize and refer to its history. Some fields have more autonomy than others and some parts more than other parts”. As such, the field is a network, a space of structural positions to which communities bring their dispositions, experience and resources. For Bourdieu (1984, 1990), the field operates like a game where actors’ actions are strategic and competitive against those of other players in the field, in explicit or implicit ways, even though his views have been criticized for treating their actions as overtly strategic (Warde 2004). The boundaries of a field, as well as the boundaries of social groups within it, are fluid, constantly negotiated and often redefined by participants themselves in order to benefit their position.

Social groups within each field are in command of field related capital, which they express through tastes, the legitimacy of which constitutes a matter of constant struggle. The dynamics of the field arise from the positions and position-taking of players who seek to establish their status in relation to dissociative others and the distinctive stylistic possibilities within a domain allow practitioners to distinguish themselves through assertion of differences. From this standpoint and for the purposes of this project, it is important to clarify that “to think in terms of the field is to think relationally” (Bourdieu 1989:39).

5.3 The Negotiation of Taste

In an attempt to put together the elements of communities of practice presented above, in this section it is proposed that in matters of taste, members of such communities share their experiences and knowledge in free flowing, creative ways that foster new ways of enforcing and reinforcing distinctions. Taste-making constitutes a situated activity within practice as it is learnt and taught as part of becoming a practitioner, whose loyalties lie with a particular community within the domain. As Gherardi (2009, 563) argues “passionate attachment of a community of practitioners to the object of their practice is the basis of taste making, i.e. the collective achievement that allows practitioners to appraise the various performances of their working practices that, in being appraised and contested, are constantly refined”. That is, refining practices

involves using the group's collective cultural capital to negotiate aesthetic categories through the appropriation of objects and production of narrative justifications. Most importantly, it involves the constant evolution of a joint enterprise that defines the position of the community in the field and deals with, at least in part, internal conflicts.

Inevitably the refinement of group practices always “extends beyond the individual and subjective setting” (Edvardsson et al. 2011, 329), since communities not only negotiate their common purpose isolated in their micro settings, but - as previous works on distaste, negative symbolic consumption, social identity theory as well as previous approaches to marketplace cultures have established - engage in mental processes of opposition and juxtaposition with other actors in the field. The “Us versus Them” argument has its roots in the idea that within domains, different ways of relating to the object of practice may give rise to different identities and different tastes, because the attachment to the object of practice varies and is contested (Gherardi 2009). Following from this, when engaging with a community of practice, status may be drawn both from the complexity of the particular practice (taste) and from its prestige by comparing it to the variable prestige of other practices (distaste) (Warde 2005). In other words, the understandings underlying the negotiation of a common purpose and refinement of practice will be partly based on rejection of outgroups’ “way of attaching to the object of practice”, thus providing the basis for taste-making.

Throughout the last chapter it has been made clear that collective taste making is closely bound to the community's joint enterprise. The connection between the two, however, is nothing but linear. Tastes affect the negotiation of a joint enterprise by dictating “what is aesthetically fitting within a community of practitioners – a preference for the way we do things together” Gherardi (2009, 535). In its turn, a joint enterprise reinforces tastes by providing ill-defined, yet powerful, normative directions for members and their practices. Consequently, researchers should not only be looking for an abstract and symbolic “Us versus Them”, but also for tastes that are provisional, conciliated and socially constructed through participation.

This thesis started off with a review of the literature aimed at probing how tastes are formed within a shared and communal context. It has been established that group practices constitute coordinated attempts to generate meaning in a way that is

detrimental to the tastes and practices of dissimilar others, as well as that their practices may be a constant negative point of reference, thereby providing an underlying mechanism for the negotiation of a common purpose and the refinement of practice. Previous works have emphasized the ease with which community members share idiosyncratic cultures and norms (see scholarship on marketplace cultures discussed earlier) and through extension similar tastes and distastes, expressed through individual and collective practices. However, it is still unclear how the group deals with conflicting worldviews and identities of members (Handley et al. 2007). Such unitary viewpoints of consumption communities neglect the broader social context and micro political factors of exhibiting collective taste, for groups face the critical challenge of resolving the social tensions caused by opinion conflicts and power differentials within their collectives (Hong and O 2009). Following from this, the question that this research aims to address is: “How is taste negotiated within a community of practitioners?”

Taking into account the various approaches on taste presented in the previous chapters, it is necessary to develop a framework that integrates both the externally driven (Us versus Them) and internal dynamics (intra-group tensions) of taste, accounting at the same time for how resources (economic, social and especially cultural capital) and the constant refinement of community practices constitute parts of the taste-making process (also see figure 1).

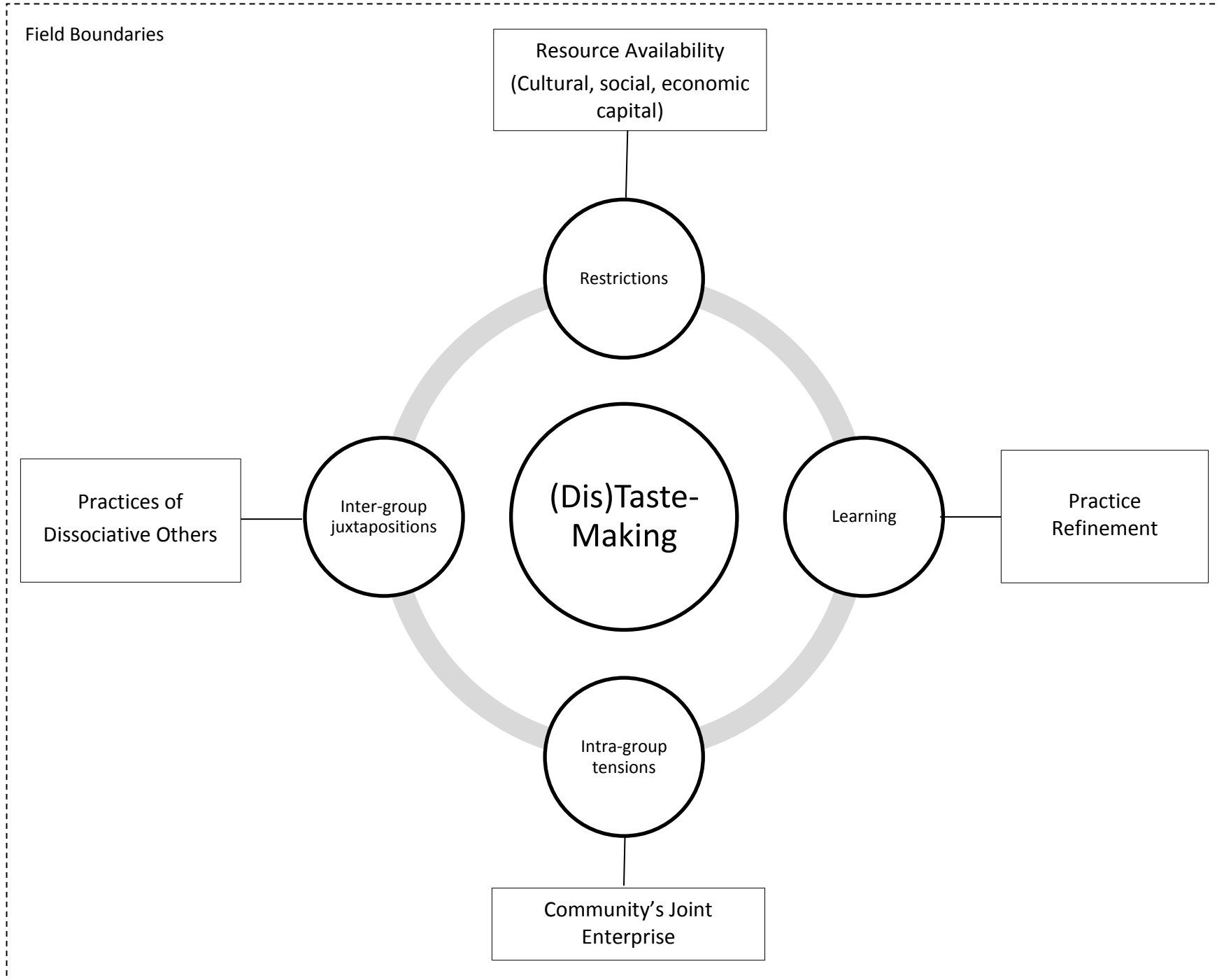
As such, the main research question of the project is:

What are the dynamics that underlie collective taste-making and how do they operate?.

To answer this overarching question, the research explores a number of theoretical gaps as found in the literature presented in the preceding chapters, these being:

- Through what processes of appropriation is (dis)taste employed to internalise meaning to practices?,
- How do members of a community of practice maintain the boundaries that distinguish them from dissimilar others? and
- How is taste negotiated within a community of practice?.

Figure 1:
Theoretical
Framework



6. Methodology

Consumer research has been dominated by ideological perspectives that have their foundations in realism, determinism and positivism (Sanders 1987). Influenced by Durkheim (1938), the key advocate of a positivist approach who promoted the view that social scientists should study the social world employing the methodologies of physical scientists, scholars have complied with a logical empiricism that suggests human behaviour is the result of objective situations or psychological factors (Sanders 1987). However, traditional models and empirical procedures have often proven inadequate in providing an understanding of human behaviour (Sanders 1987). As a result, subjectivist approaches and interpretive methods have (re)asserted themselves within various social science disciplines and their legitimacy has now been well established in relation to more conventional approaches (Lincoln and Guba 2003).

In line with this development, this study is based on a constructivist framework of inquiry, with the ontological and epistemological foundations being explained in more depth in this chapter. The methodological choice of ethnography as a suitable way to address the research questions presented in the previous chapter is also discussed. Along with the project's aim of theorising taste-making in communities from a new angle, the chosen framework of inquiry and methodology allow for a better understanding of the examined phenomena, not in order to provide direct technical expertise from a marketing point of view, but to provide rich data on how social groups negotiate meanings. As Hackley (1998, 130) puts it "within marketing, a social constructionist research agenda would, in focussing on interpretations of the qualitative aspects of practitioner (and consumer) experience within marketing, move marketing theory away from a model of managerialism which presupposes the technical expertise of marketing practitioners and the political neutrality of marketing activity (and management) itself. (...)Rigorous and effective theory building in marketing must be founded on a reflexive understanding of how meaning is constructed in the social world in order to be meaningful in and to the social world of marketing" .

Aside from outlining the philosophical foundations and justifying the methodological choices made, this chapter also provides an overview of the context of the research, an independent arts cooperative located in the United Kingdom. Regarding which, it provides arguments as to why the selected community is an appropriate match for the theoretical framework and research questions asked, as well as an extensive description of the context and the researcher's experience within it. The lattermost serves the purposes of reflexivity and allows the researcher to "tell the truth" about the making of the account (Gergen and Gergen 2003).

6.1 Framework of Inquiry

The research is based on a constructivist framework of inquiry which holds that what we take to be objective knowledge and truth is the result of perspective (Schwandt 1994). The choice of a constructivist approach is partly based on the need to study the meaning of the practices of a community from its members' perspective and thus to acquire an emic point of view on the group. It is worth clarifying that social constructivism is closely related to social constructionism in the sense that people are working together to construct the meaning of artefacts. Most scholars do not distinguish between the two as they are easily confused and difficult to distinguish (Patton [1990] 2002). A stated difference is that social constructionism focuses on the meanings that are created through the social interactions of a group, while social constructivism focuses on an individual's learning that takes place because of their interactions in a group. This researcher probes both of these processes and the two terms are used interchangeably.

The ontological foundations of the study stem from the acceptance that what we take to be real is a construction in the mind of individuals (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Following social constructionism's principles, people create a world in the process of social exchange which is a reality unique in its own kind (Schwandt 1994). The ontology of constructivism is anti-foundational (Lincoln 1995; 1998) in the sense that it rejects any static or "foundational" standards by which truth can be universally known (Lincoln and Guba 2003, 273). From this standpoint, the bedrock of this philosophical approach is relativism, since "truth is only relative to one's mode of engagement with

the world for which no independently existing evaluative criteria exist” (Johnson and Duberley 2000, 109-110).

This relativist view contends that the world is the result of representational practices and that science “is a social and historical enterprise, and its knowledge products can be affected as much by sociological factors as by purely “cognitive” or empirical considerations” (Anderson 1986, 156). Following from this, the claims of relativism have a dual impact on this particular project. Firstly, in dealing with the research process itself, it is acknowledged that the researcher’s perceptions of the studied phenomena are dependent upon the sociocultural burden carried and as such may affect both the research process and the interpretation of the data collected. Secondly, the theoretical framework of the project highlights the importance of relativism since perceptions over what constitutes “appropriate practice” are entirely dependent on various actors’ worldviews and the interactions amongst them. Essentially this means that both the researcher and the respondents are bound to their sociohistoric environments. As such, the researcher cannot be completely detached from the observed and hence the findings will be themselves constructions of the research process (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Congruent with the attempt to conceptualise taste-making as a dynamic process of negotiation, the epistemological foundations of the research are subjectivist, while knowledge and meanings under this philosophical persuasion are an “active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationship” (Gergen 1985, 267). The study’s theoretical framework was set out on the assumption that taste-making is the subject of meanings that are co-constructed by members of communities of practice. Such meaning-making activities are of central importance to constructivists because it is precisely this sense-making that shapes action (Lincoln and Guba 2003). Crotty (1998) defines constructionism as the view that “all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (42). From this standpoint, meaning is not “there” to be discovered but “arises from the relationship between members of some stake-holding community” (Lincoln and Guba 2003, 273). Agreements as to what constitutes “the truth” are the subject of negotiations which are validated though a community

narrative that is subject to the conditions that give rise to the group (Lincoln and Guba 2003, 273). By investigating the narrative of a particular community of practice the study investigates the manner in which contested practices are accepted as “truthfully” tasteful and thus accepted by the group, or “truthfully” inappropriate and consequently rejected.

At this stage it is also worth clarifying that the philosophical backbone of the study is poststructuralism, rather than postmodernism. Poststructuralism, introduced by French philosopher Jacques Derrida in 1966, is compatible with the relativist and subjectivist underpinnings of social constructionism, because it asserts that there are multiple truths and realities, none of which is can be considered superior or more valid over the other (Johnson and Duberley 2000). Reality is viewed as historically, socially and culturally dependent but unlike postmodernist assumptions, the importance of the material and the symbolic is not overlooked (Elliott and Ritson 1998). In other words, poststructuralism sees truth as socially constituted and structured by members of society, accounting for the material conditions and experiences of subjects, but at the same time acknowledging the political social settings in which such experiences are located (Elliott and Ritson 1998). The poststructuralist tradition constitutes a critique to its structuralism predecessor by asserting that people are not born into predetermined structures, but (socially) construct their own. “Narratively speaking, structuralism asks what is the story, whereas post-structuralism asks whose story is it anyway” (Shankar et al. 2001, 436).

An important dimension of poststructural analysis related to this project, is the concept of difference. Its philosophical underpinnings state that meaning is created through comparison and contrast (Scott 1988). Scott (1988), in particular, states that terms are only meaningful insofar as they are compared with others. Poststructuralists also believe that experiences are structured by binary distinctions that are socially constructed (e.g. mind/body, male /female, taste/distaste etc) rather than a reflection of reality (Thompson and Hirschman 1995). Taking as a starting point the idea that constructionists are concerned with the production and organisation of differences (Fuss 1989, 3), the match of this particular framework of inquiry with the project is also justified given that one of the main objectives is to demonstrate how communities produce and maintain symbolic boundaries by juxtaposing their practices to those of

dissimilar others. It is worth clarifying here that comparisons and juxtapositions amongst social groups are not taken as sharply classified, as they would from a structuralist –and thus reductionist- perspective. As Elliott (1997) argues ““the juxtaposition of opposites and contradictions” (Foster 1983) is called for by postmodern theorists in the hope that it can develop our understanding(s) of the meaning(s) of these complex ideas. As a heuristic device, these bipolar oppositions should not be read as posited structures but merely as aids to coming to grips with the sometimes mind-numbing interrelations between what are often incommensurable concepts”. Following from this, oppositional relationships will be treated as imperfect, temporary and relative to the mindset of respondents and the sociocultural context in which they are embedded.

Finally, according to Scott (1992), poststructuralism is based on Saussure’s principle that signs have meanings “by virtue of their difference from other signs” and on Derrida’s argument that new meanings of signs are constructed upon prior significations of items. More specifically, “already-used words and images are reassembled, in an act and form that Derrida calls bricolage, and they come to mean in the way that they shimmer against each other and against their previous context” (Scott 1992, 597). This "play" among the previous and new signification of items is relevant to the study of how the meanings of particular items and practices are appropriated by different users or social groups. In other words, by altering the meaning of practices, consumers and consumer groups are able to assert distinctions through a subtle “bricolage” that is inaccessible to those not possessing the necessary code (field-related capital).

6.2 Ethnographic Research

Given the constructivist foundations of the project and the aim to study the practices and relative perceptions of a particular community that has its own distinctive culture, an ethnographic approach was considered to be an appropriate methodological match. As Goffman (1961, ix-x) puts it, any group of people “develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable and normal once you get close to it” and so “a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members”. In order to explicate meanings from the community of inquiry emic knowledge is required, which is best achieved through ethnographic investigation (Holt

1997). Ethnography is based on the naturalist principles that “appreciate subjects’ common sense as constitutive of social reality” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 97) and is able to provide holistic and comprehensive accounts of communities (Stewart 1998). Since “cultural capital is socially consequential only when converted into particularized field specific forms” (Holt 1997, 97), it was considered necessary to approach and become familiar with a distinct field. Subsequently, choosing specific natural micro-setting within that field would allow for studying not only how taste is co-created by a particular group of people, but also how it is actualized through practices.

Ethnographic research was pioneered in the early 20th century in the field of cultural anthropology (Harvey and Myers 1995), where an ethnography was a descriptive account of a community or tribe in a non-Western context (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Under this lens, the researcher is observing from a quasi-inside perspective and subsequently explains his or her understanding of the native world, including its knowledge, beliefs, values, meanings and activities. More recently ethnography has helped the understanding of consumer society in relation to urban tribes, such as Harley Davidson bikers or Burning Man festival participants. The simplest definition of this methodology states that it is a set of methods for studying a group of people (McGivern [2003] 2006), used to answer “how” or “why” questions regarding decision making processes. The choice of ethnography is relevant to the aim of this study which is to understand the *how* of taste-making, rather than to develop solutions (e.g. action research), generate statistical measures (e.g. survey research) or explore broadly without a pre-set aim (e.g. grounded theory). The focus of ethnography is usually a single setting or group of people in order to facilitate depth (over breadth) of study. Consistent with this, this study is conducted in the context of a single community, more specifically an arts cooperative, detailed information on which is provided later in the chapter. The goal of the ethnographer is to gain a rich, textured and holistic understanding of behaviour in its socio-cultural context and to understand life as people live it, not as they report they do. As such, people’s actions are studied in their original, everyday context (as opposed to experimental setups), which is why ethnographic research is also referred to as “fieldwork”.

6.3 Choice of Settings

At the initial stages of the quest for suitable settings to conduct the ethnographic study I was interested in questions surrounding how do social groups decide and distinguish what is legitimate taste from their relative point of view. As such, I was looking for settings where actors would place high significance in their cultural know-how. From an analytic standpoint, an arts related community seemed to be a suitable context. Multiple possibilities within the arts field were available, ranging from members of nationally famous art venues and communities within local art spaces to audiences of private spaces. I soon came across the Brik, an independent arts cooperative projecting films and hosting live music and performance events. The choice of an arts cooperative as a research context provides a good “fit” with the theoretical domain in which the project aims to make a contribution, namely taste-making, because of the particularities of the community, including dedication to carefully chosen art forms, a very distinctive space and an explicit anti-establishment ethic that enable the researcher to uncover the co-creation and use of (dis)taste in the maintenance of symbolic boundaries.

Using “extraordinary contexts to examine how constructs operate at extremes” (Arnould, Price and Moisio 2006, 110) is not uncommon amongst qualitative researchers. Such contexts allow for theoretically interesting factors to emerge more easily, making the phenomenon of interest salient for observation. The aspects of the context that enable theoretical payoff (Arnould, Price and Moisio 2006) in this case are the oppositional identity of the Brik and its positioning as an alternative space for the enjoyment of the arts that “aims to make a difference” as stated on the website, which makes expressions of (dis)taste of central importance in the practices of the group. By isolating the community, the researcher is able to observe the negotiation and performance of taste in a group whose common purpose is to run an arts venue that makes a statement against mainstream dissociative others. In other words, this is a context where the avoidance of practices that “don’t fit” with the group’s idiosyncrasies is conspicuously manifested through programming choices, narratives, and the nature of the environment, thus making it a prominent site to study taste-making.

Following this, the cooperative nature of the community opened up a new path for the project, namely, examining taste-making not only in relation to consumption but to the

increasingly important “productive consumption”. The concept of productive consumption is an inherent one in all cases where consumers are recognized as active co-creators of value. As Press and Arnould (2011) suggest, the underlying idea behind it is founded upon Stebbins’s (1982) concept of serious leisure (i.e. in a future where job opportunities will be reduced, individuals will be forced to try and take advantage of their capabilities during their leisure time), which includes: amateurism, pursuing hobbies and volunteering.

Characteristics of productive consumption are apparent in brand communities, co-consuming groups as well as consumer-organisation contexts (which is the case with the Brik), where individuals use their resources to bring a project to life. The modernist phenomenological dichotomy of production/consumption, stemming out of a historical gendered dichotomy between man as the producer and woman as the consumer, as well as the division between the public and private sphere of an individual, corresponding to the dichotomy between work and play, is said to be eliminated in postmodernity (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). As Firat and Venkatesh (1995, 254) argue, there is no natural distinction between production and consumption, the two are the same and occur simultaneously. Evidence of this blurring of boundaries is to be found in multiple consumer culture studies. For example, Giesler (2006) describes the music file-sharing practices of a community whose members produce value by offering/uploading files for others to consume and devour value by downloading files generated by others. From this standpoint, the napster community is as much a consumption collective as it is a production one. Similar observations can be made in the co-created experience of Mardi Gras festival participants (Weinberger and Wallendorf 2012), while Schau et al. (2009) describe how coproductive activities in consumer collectives produce value, thereby challenging the idea that consumption is only destroying the value generated during production.

Not unlike previous works within the Consumer Culture Theory realm, the chosen site allows for the observation of the coproductive activities of a collective that is both experience and oppositional identity based (Schau et al. 2009). Indeed, practices of the community within the Brik represent a good example of the blurring of boundaries between production and consumption as well as Stebbins’s (1982) “serious leisure”, with members using their (cultural) competences to produce experiences for their own

as well as the public's consumption. The benefit of researching a coproductive community is that it allows for placing the focus not only on how modes of consumption influence taste-making (as Holt 1998; Hennion 2002; 2004; 2007, Arsel and Thompson 2010; Arsel and Bean 2013) have extensively demonstrated), but also how modes of production do. In other words, while the blurring of the boundaries between production and consumption is widely recognized within the study of consumer culture, in general, and studies on taste, in particular, the role of the manner of production in the taste making process has seldom been discussed.

6.4 Data collection methods

A number of ethnographic methods have been used to gather data: observations, unsolicited accounts and non-directive interviews. The research design of the study has been kept flexible (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Arnould and Wallendorf 1994) to allow for grounded theorizing and to this end the researcher adopted a partial induction approach. That is, unlike fully inductive studies where researchers enter an investigation with no a priori framework, in this study many of the key constructs have already been well-defined and the research questions are guided by a well-established body of literature. However, the existence of a theoretical framework is not to say that observations and interviews were fully guided. On the contrary, the researcher allowed the phenomena of interest to drive and develop both the observations and the research questions. This approach allows for theoretical contributions by offering new insights to the examined phenomena and by reflecting on the potential limits and extensions of current approaches. Given the partial reliance on an existing framework, it also achieves a high level of continuity (Tsui 2004).

Data collection methods are described in detail in the sections below and are summarised in figure 2:

Figure 2: Research Activity

Method	Execution	Data Gathered
Participant Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Volunteer role acquired in community: participation in weekly events, weekly meetings and sub-groups (film making and podcasting)- Participation in mailing lists (volunteers and programming)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- One year participation- Over 200 pages of field notes- 4000 emails, 800 of which were used in data analysis
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Approached volunteers met through participation in the community. Participant observation allowed to select a varied sample in terms of views, length of service and age	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 15 in-depth interviews
Unsolicited Accounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Informally posed questions to respondents when the situation and context were deemed suitable	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Over 80 unsolicited accounts recorded in field notes

6.4.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation was conducted by volunteering in the community, a role which was maintained for one year (October 2011-September 2012), with two evenings per week being spent at the venue that hosts the group. Apart from observing the physical activities of the group, valuable observations were also conducted by subscribing to the various mailing lists that the community uses as decision making forums. Particularly in relation to observations of the mailing lists, over 4000 emails were exchanged during my subscription, all of which were monitored for relevant data. A large number of emails were dismissed due to the content being of a purely informational/functional nature (e.g. calls for volunteers to help out during understaffed nights, administrative information in relation to booking bands/films etc). However, over 800 emails were deemed relevant and the respondent accounts they provided were scrutinised for themes/patterns. Email exchange turned out to be a particularly useful insight to the

community because similarly to observations taking place in the physical space of the group, it allowed me direct insights to how members interact and engage in debates on various topics.

I first spent time solely volunteering at the venue (October 2011-January 2012), familiarizing myself both with the members and their practices. Observation was the first step in order to gain a general understanding of the symbolic world to be studied (Elliott and Elliott 2003), become familiar with everyday operations, understand local rules, learn the language used and get to know possible respondents. Field notes, in the form of mental and jotted notes while at the venue, were kept at all times and these were subsequently turned into full text. Apart from serving the purpose of becoming familiarized with the micro-settings, observation is also important as a complementary method to oral accounts as it is argued that people are unable to describe and reflect fully on their complex behaviours (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). Participant observation allows the researcher to observe directly the meaning system used by actors, it can help compare what people say they do (attitude) with what they do in an actual situations and consequently helps to make sure that data collected in other ways (interviews/unsolicited accounts) illustrate the full picture (Sanders 1987).

The participant-as-observer role that I adopted through volunteering was considered superior to remaining a plain observer, which runs the danger of misunderstanding the orientations of the participants or experiencing situations where respondents feel that they need to hide their activities from outsiders (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994.) However, becoming over familiar with the settings and members due to the amount of time spent with the group is a potential pitfall in participant observation. This is because “going native” can make it difficult to recognize phenomena that are meaningful, thus resulting in their being overlooked as insignificant (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Fielding [2001] 2008; Wirth 1964). Additionally, spending too much time with the native group is often found to lead to a celebration of their culture (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995), rather than culminating in robust balanced research outcomes. All in all, “one is participating in order to get detailed data, not to provide the group with a new member” (Fielding [2001] 2008, 271) and so following literature suggestions a marginal native role (Freilich 1970) (also referred as “professional stranger” role (Agar 1996)) was adopted. From this standpoint, with the active membership role acquired I

became involved in the group's activities without fully embracing its values and goals (Adler and Adler 1994).

During the participant observations, Spradley's (1980) descriptive question matrix (82-83) was used as an initial guide (see appendix), which contains nine dimensions for observations, under the assumption that observing and reporting these dimensions and their interrelations can describe any social situation. As immersion in the community grew stronger, my attention was focused on particular aspects of the matrix that seemed more important in addressing the research questions and/or that what factors were especially prominent for observation. Observations can be divided into the three stages identified by Spradley (1980): descriptive, focused and selective. Descriptive observations refer to my initial, basic comprehension of the community, familiarising myself with the environment, the people in it and the informal rules and procedures. While this stage is not necessarily particularly fruitful in addressing research questions it is nevertheless necessary to (a) confirm that the community chosen is a suitable context to study the phenomena of interest and (b) to examine possible dimensions that seem more promising for further observations. Consequently, the focused observations were centred on particular domains that were considered to be more revealing in relation the theoretical interest of the project and/ or because they were persistently highlighted by the informants. In the latter case and as Spradley (1980, 105) notes "if you listen to what people say, they often drop hints as to what they feel is important in their words". The two main domains of focus were actors (and particularly their interrelations with goals, activities, acts and events) and space (and particularly its interrelation with objects, actors, activities, acts and goals). The focus on actors was both dictated by the nature of the project and by the respondents themselves who were especially willing to discuss tensions amongst them, while space was an emerging dimension of focus, given the importance that the building itself seemed to play in taste-making. This is not to say that the remaining dimensions of the matrix were ignored, but their role was observed primarily in relation to the two main domains of focus. The third stage of selective observations refers to the looking for similarities/differences amongst previously identified cultural categories of interest. This last stage was largely conducted through analysing and thinking of previous observations as well as by conducting additional observations on site. (e.g. the different manners in which actors use space in their narratives to assert "us and them" tensions and how this potentially

differs amongst different events/actors). Of course, observational data on their own cannot shed light on the perceptions, values and beliefs of the respondents and so complementary methods were considered necessary (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994).

6.4.2 Unsolicited Accounts

Getting closer to members by adopting a volunteering role helps in extracting the value of pure sociability (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995), which pertains to developing trust and hence provoking small talk. A result of this is the gathering of unsolicited accounts occurring either amongst participants or amongst participants and the researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Agar 1996). Unsolicited accounts consequently became part of the strategy, whereby I posed questions to the respondents when the situation and context were deemed suitable in an attempt to get as “experience-near” as possible (Geertz 1973). During the participant observation over 80 unsolicited accounts were collected, which were kept in noteform as observations or in some cases recorded as “direct quotes”.

6.4.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews were conducted with 15 members with different backgrounds (e.g. age, occupation) and status in the community (core, marginal and peripheral members). These lasted from 60 to 75 minutes and took place in cafes that the respondents chose. The exact timing and purpose of the interviews is explained in the overview of my ethnographic experience later in the chapter.

Even though the interviews had an exploratory aim, a semi-structured guide was used (available in the appendix), which was considered important in order to (a) preserve an order in the discussion of different matters for each respondent, (b) schedule a set of prompts, (c) provide direction and scope and (d) allow the interviewee to focus on the respondent (McCracken 1988). The interviews were organised around grand tour questions and prompts (McCracken 1988), which drew upon either my observations, stories and narratives provided by other respondents and/or the account of the particular

respondent that was being interviewed at the time. Interviewees were firstly asked to talk about their background and personal interest in the arts to help achieve a first impression on their cultural competences. Such opening grand tour questions (Spradley 1979) give background and warm up respondents. Subsequently they were questioned on their involvement in the community and encouraged to give personal stories from experiences they had had. Community practices were discussed in relation to the members' roles in the Brik, the nature and social aspects of the community, decision making processes, the values and ethos of the community and difficulties faced or ways in which the community is dysfunctional. Prompts were used to encourage respondents to elaborate on matters that got my attention from observations, previous accounts or instantly recognized as potentially useful. On many occasions I would ask respondents to reflect on particular situations that I had observed while volunteering in the community and these questions would be repeated to all of them in order to create an indirect "dialogue" amongst them. Moreover, verification questions were used to ensure that my understanding of the respondents' stories was accurate, while contrast questions (Spradley 1979) were useful in identifying juxtapositions between the community and its dissimilar others. Overall an unobtrusive profile was kept and most questions were phrased in a general manner that gave a great extent of freedom to the interviewees.

6.5 Description of Settings and History

6.5.1 The Birth

The Brik was formally incorporated in 2000. However, its origins lie further back, in an informal, experimental cinema exhibition group which ran for several years before the opportunity arose to take over the running of the building where it is currently located, which previously hosted an arts centre cinema. The business was a success and grew as the programme of events developed. The number of volunteer members also significantly rose in the past decade, starting from a group of four friends to over 250 members today.

6.5.2 How the Brik Works

Volunteers are carrying out work that falls into two broad categories: event staff and day staff. The space is open to the public during the evenings and any income generated from ticket and bar sales goes towards the costs of running the community. The group receives no other funding, in an attempt to keep its operations independent from the control and influence of any external organisations. Event staff are responsible for the daily events that take place in the Brik and include bartenders, projectionists, front of house staff, event managers and sound engineers. To take up one of these roles (on a night-to-night basis), members sign up on a rota clipboard which is to be found in the Brik office. Events are mostly in the afternoon and evening, but on rare occasions there might be happenings during the day. Day staff are responsible for looking after the administration, which includes programming films and performance events, publicity, accounting, production of the printed programme, management of the rota, repairs and cleaning.

New volunteers start out doing evening shifts. The duties that need to be carried out in an evening role are straightforward and simplified in order to be accessible to anyone without specialised skills. Training for a role takes place while carrying it out, usually with the help of a more experienced member. Moving on to take up one of the more responsible roles, however (e.g. becoming a programmer or accountant), involves shadowing and more extensive training.

6.5.3 Organisational Structure and Decision Making

The Brik is a cooperative, which means that all volunteers have a stake in the business and a say in how it is run. The forum for this is mostly the weekly volunteers meetings, which allow staff to bring up and discuss questions and issues about the running of the community, both long term and day to day. In addition to these general meetings, there is a legal requirement for the directors to meet regularly. However, these meetings are held only for the purpose of ensuring legal compliance and do not have any more decision making powers than the weekly volunteers meetings. Regular smaller group

meetings are also in place, focusing on more specific domains of decision making, such as film programming, music and live events, IT and finance.

Aside from physical meetings (which inevitably are never attended by all volunteers), another key aspect of the Brik's decision making is the use of email lists. All volunteers are required to participate in the general "volunteers" list, which is used to share information about rota slots that need filling, discussion of relevant Brik matters and general conversations. Minutes from the weekly meetings are always distributed via this forum, to ensure that all members stay informed of any issues that have arisen and decisions that have been made. There are several other "thematic" mailing lists, (e.g. programming, music, IT and finance) to which members can request subscription.

Because of the flat hierarchy of the Brik, all meetings try to reach consensus with regards to any decision to be made. Voting is a rejected method because it is thought of as enforcing the opinion of the majority on all. Unlike many organisations, the Brik community is rather informal in that it does not have written rules, procedures or policies, but it is common practice, however, that any significant changes within the group must go through discussion at the meeting and through the mailing list.

6.6 A Reflexive Account of my Time at the Brik

6.6.1 The First Contact

In this subsection I discuss in more detail methodological issues surrounding participant observation, detailing how I discovered and accessed the research site, how I established relationships with the research participants, how my role in the community developed and how the focus of my observations shifted from looking at how the group retains its off-the-mainstream image on the outside, to how members conciliate disagreements regarding the manner in which the community manifests tastes. By narrating the process of my entry and integration to the community I primarily aim to provide an introduction and overview of the research context to the reader that can be used as a foundation for the reading and understanding of the research findings, but also an opportunity to reflect critically on myself as a researcher. Detailing my Brik

experience is also necessary from a methodological point of view in relation to assessing the reliability of the findings and rigour of the data collection methods employed. Meardi (2000) in particular argues that describing the context of enquiry is especially critical for qualitative studies where the manner of data collection can bias findings. I should also note that some insights presented in this account will be used to form part of the general findings of the thesis.

My quest for a research context was conducted within the field of the arts since the first days of enrolling on the doctoral programme for a variety of reasons. I have always had an interest in film and the visual arts, in the beginning purely as a hobby and a way to pass leisure time, and later on as a potential domain where I could develop a career, starting by pursuing a master's degree in managing in the creative and cultural industries. My curiosity about the arts field was further reinforced by a long-lasting informal contact with "art world" members (used here similarly to Becker [1982], to describe the loose network of people involved in the production and dissemination of art) of my hometown, Athens, through my best friend who is a fashion designer spending her time surrounded by a social milieu of: visual artists, curators, photographers and arts entrepreneurs. I have never been part of that tribe myself, but on multiple occasions observed the uses of taste of this entourage as an outsider. Finally, it is not without reason that previous works on taste have focused on the field of the arts. Multiplicity of offerings and passionate attachment of social groups to genres, movements and styles, has long generated taste wars that aim to legitimise choices and prove the superiority of one form over another (Becker 1982).

The city where the research was conducted is known for its vibrant cultural life: commercial spaces include multiplex chain cinemas Odeon and Showcase, highbrow venues comprise a 19th century old theatre company and a nationally renowned symphony hall, there is a multiplicity of independent contemporary venues including innovative studio theatres and cross-artwork spaces and finally, a wide range of smaller, independently run communities that specialise in organising small scale art exhibitions, gigs and performances and capitalise on an "alternative" positioning. Aware of the complex arts map of the city, rather than attempting to negotiate access to a community I was already familiar with, I decided to research blogs and local forums and explore new possibilities, which is how I came across the Brik.

My expectations of what I would encounter at the Brik were set up before my first contact with its members and even before my first visit to the physical space where the community operates. Being an active arts goer, the very fact that I had never heard of it before had in itself an element of discovering one of the city's best kept secrets – a representation that I later found out was to some extent promoted by members - a space concealed from the wider public. My assumptions about the kind of community I had stumbled across were further verified simply by browsing through the group's website. Written in basic HTML, with a striking absence of visuals and a black-and-white logo, the site signified the opposite of "cinema for the masses". This "bare" website serves two purposes: a functional one, which is to provide information with regards to the activities taking place in the Brik, and second, a "filtering" one, by putting off those audiences that would require a glossy interface to be seduced.

Intrigued by the voluntary nature of the community and the anti-establishment feelings manifested on the website, I decided to explore the group further. The programme comprised an eclectic selection of movies and one-off live music events, with the vast majority of what was on offer being unfamiliar to me. At this point, I made the decision to make my first physical contact with the community, playing the role of a customer over that of a researcher. I asked a friend to come along with me and we chose a repertoire cinema evening, showcasing a well-known 50's circus film, "Trapeze". That same afternoon the website was updated with a message warning of the possibility of cancellation, which, to my surprise, was later confirmed just two hours before the scheduled showcase time. The movie was on for a second night, so the following evening my friend and I made our way down to the Brik for the very first time.

Before arrival at the premises, I felt utterly in the dark about not only as to what I was about to encounter but primarily, being very self-conscious of my outsider status, as to how I was supposed to behave. Upon arrival, the first thing we came across was a metal door in a wall which was facing a small pedestrian road and was surrounded by graffiti, but with no actual indication that this was the entrance. A few minutes later and after talking to a couple of passers-by, we realised that this was only a side access for volunteers and that the audience should use the main entrance which was located just around the corner. Waiting outside the front entryway in what looked like an empty car

park, I got the chance to observe the building: the structural shape of three cubes attached to one another and the plain brown brick walls gave an industrial feel to the observer. Notably, there was a single window visible in the wall and the only thing in vivid colour was a red-blue neon sign on top of the terrace, reading “Brik”.

As a frequent movie-goer, my expectations of the cinema experience were fairly challenged on that first visit to the Brik. The hegemonic cinema routine I would usually follow included arriving at the venue early on, queuing to buy tickets, purchasing drinks or food from the canteen and watching a good 15 minutes of trailers and adverts before the movie was finally shown. Therefore, I was puzzled by the fact that 15 minutes before the scheduled time that the movie was supposed to start the entrance was still shut. There were a couple more people waiting outside with us which at least reassured me that we were in the right place.

At last, we were let in just a few minutes before the movie was scheduled to start. We quickly walked past a small patio area and entered the building, to find ourselves in what seemed like a reception hall that was overfilled with posters, magazines and flyers of past Brik events and other local happenings. The wall was painted blue but the colour and texture were significantly worn. We were unsure of which direction to take and speculatively walked towards the right to find ourselves in what seemed like a main area. Taking an investigating look around in the darkened room I saw a small bar, an “attached” waiting room to my right that got some natural light from the single window that I earlier had observed and after putting in some more effort I managed to trace a single cash till in the corner of the room, where I presumed we could buy tickets. I found myself feeling like a fish out of water, primarily because the space did not indicate to us where to go, what to do or who to interact with. Contrary to our expectations, it was also impossible to tell which of the people in the room actually worked there and which were customers.

We reluctantly walked towards the till and asked the people who were chatting next to it whether we could buy tickets there. A scruffy looking girl in her late twenties asked us if we were members and informed us that buying a membership card (costing £1 and lasting for a lifetime) was compulsory. We agreed and spent £9 for two cinema tickets and two membership cards, in what seemed like the cheapest price I had paid in a

cinema in almost a decade. In return, we got an old style, stamp size cinema ticket and a loyalty card bearing the name of the Brik with a green psychedelic design. Stuck in our cinema habits and not knowing what else to do, we then headed to the bar, where the drinks on offer were written in chalk on a background blackboard. Below this, the faded blue wall was covered with banknotes from all over the world stuck on with blue-tack and further below the available spirits and bottled beers were on display on a dusty shelf. We asked for a cider and a cup of tea which was served to us in a casual mug and when asked whether we could take the drinks with us in the movie hall, the surprised volunteer answered that “of course we could”. My friend joked about how we were spared the questions we usually get asked in the multiplexes, “Would you like to upgrade for £1 to a large Coke? Do you know about our menu deal?”. The drinks were the cheapest I have ever bought in the city.

A few people were standing in the middle of the room, drinking and chatting loudly but we opted for a couch located in the attached room, separated by two to three stairs from the main area, so I could observe at a distance. We sat down on the worn couch and I finally had some time to overcome my anxiety and look at the space I had found myself in. The main area had no windows at all and the artificial, very low light gave the room the “underground” feeling of an alternative bar rather than that of a cinema. There was a distinct smell of stale air filled with damp and the low ceiling created the illusion of being in a box. Wherever the eye fell, there was something new to discover: artwork hanging on the walls, event flyers on the coffee table, fairy lights decorating parts of the ceiling and little nooks and corners that seemed to serve no obvious purpose but to give a mystifying feeling. Everything around us was worn and old. Aside from a couple who seemed to be new to the space similarly to me and my friend, the rest of the people present, whether volunteers or customers, seemed to know each other quite well. There was a clear sense of community, manifested in the manner in which people interacted with each other and the comfort with which they circulated in the space. Their appearance - purposeful shabby clothing, styling, make-up and hair- further reinforced my outsider feeling.

We entered the cinema hall with 20 minutes delay. The room had the air of an old cinema, evoked in the materials, colours and lighting: dark brown wooden floors and velvet red folding chairs arranged in an amphitheatre structure, facing towards an

elevated wooden stage on the back of which the screen rose. The smell of damp was even more overpowering in the hall. We took seats towards the back and there were no more than 10 people in the audience, despite the capacity being close to 100. The seats were very uncomfortable and creaked each time anyone made even the slightest move. Subsequently, the movie started immediately without any trailers or adverts.

6.6.2 Gaining Access

That first evening in the Brik, I left feeling content that I had found my research site. Gaining access was straightforward. The community was constantly on the lookout for help with work and so I enquired for a volunteer position, revealing in my email application that I was interested in studying the Brik community as part of my project. I purposefully avoided giving too much detail as to what exactly I was interested in. “Normalising social research”, in other words making it sound simple, appealing and accessible to respondents, is a strategy often proposed by ethnographers (Johnson 1975). Given that there are no particular requirements as to who can join, I got invited to attend a volunteers’ induction a couple of months later. The person who responded to my initial request let me know that it was fine for me to do my research in the Brik, as long as I committed to helping out for a period of at least six months. At that time, I did not receive any additional questions with regards to the nature of what I wanted to study or the specificities of how I would carry the research out.

I subsequently attended an induction along with a dozen more new volunteers. I was instructed by email to enter by the side door that I had traced on my first visit, rather than by the main entrance, which gave me a material confirmation that my role was to transform from that of a customer to that of a member. I paid attention to my outfit, taking care not necessarily to “fit in” but at least to not stand out. Personal appearance has been cited as an important consideration for ethnographers (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995), particularly in the early days of trying to gain trust. The Brik bore the same smell of damp as the last time I was there. I was led down a long corridor by one of the existing volunteers to what turned out to be a “backstage” office space, concealed behind the bar area that I had found myself in during the first visit, and accessible to volunteers only. There was a clear contrasting image between existing volunteers who

were lively, chatting to one another while carrying out various tasks and a very silent group of a dozen new volunteers, who, like myself, were sitting around a table, waiting for the induction to start. The office room was very spacious, but messy and full of clutter: boxes, recycling bins, computer screens, folders and documents, timetables and posters hanging from walls and to the side a small kitchen. People turned to me and briefly said hello. I found myself surprised that ages in the room varied significantly ranging from early the twenties to early sixties. I had associated the Brik with youth subculture movements, but instead what I later discovered was that it was made up of people whose cognitive age, in the words of Goulding and Shankar (2002), was out of synch with their chronological age. Having said this, most of the new people in the induction group, however, on that day, fell within the 25 to 40 years age range .

The induction was run by three existing members who welcomed us and gave some general information about the community and the way it is run. We were then asked to briefly introduce ourselves. The majority of the new members stated that they were new to the city and were looking for opportunities to socialize (“I recently moved here”). Some were recent graduates who were looking to fill in their time while job hunting, whilst others were interested in gaining working experience in an arts organization (“I recently graduated from a film course at the University and looking for some experience”). Others said that they simply had nothing better to do with their time (“Last year I did nothing with my evenings”). When asked to share with the group the reasons why I wanted to volunteer at the Brik I did not conceal the fact that I wanted to study the manner in which the community operated as part of my PhD, but I also stressed my interest in the arts. The reason I opted for overt research was that this approach would allow me to move in the settings more freely (Fielding [2001] 2008). The existing volunteers briefly explained to us the different roles that we could get involved with in the Brik, as well as how to take up one of these by signing up on a rota that was hanging on the wall in the office. Before leaving I signed up for my very first shift the coming week: selling membership cards.

6.6.3 The Evolution of my Role

As mentioned earlier, my role during data collection was that of a participant observer (Junker 1960; Gold 1958). The observer role would most of the time overshadow my participant role, primarily because the length of the ethnography (one year), in combination with my relatively low field-related capital, was not sufficient for me to assume a very senior/demanding role (or one that would have direct influence in the group's taste-making for that matter). In communities of practice terminology, I remained a peripheral member (Wenger et al. 2002) throughout my participant observation, though inarguably towards the later phase of the ethnography my status was far better established when compared to the early days, primarily due to my elevated social capital and cultivated relations. This peripheral status has its advantages as it provides the researcher with sufficient emotional distance to conduct observations and avoids the danger of over-rapport (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995) that could lead to identifying with members views and losing the ability to be critical and analytical about the social situations observed. The peripheral-native role, however, has also been criticised for not allowing the researcher to appreciate the true character of the group's life (Styles 1979), which has become known as the outsider-insider problematic (Merton 1972; Labaree 2002; Kusow 2003). In this project, the danger of failing to understand the orientations of the participants was overcome by using interviews that allowed members to "set the record straight" in case their behaviours had been misinterpreted.

The first shifts that I worked at the Brik were exploratory. My focus was on learning how to carry out the duties of the role right and get to know members more closely, in other words, I adopted an "acceptable incompetent" role (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). I initially tried multiple roles, including selling membership, ushering, bartending and shadowing projectionists in order to take up a projectionist role, but after a month of experimenting I found that the role that offered me more access and better insights was that of working at the bar. The "social" role of the bartender brought me in contact not only with the other members who would help out each time in the bar area, but also with a number of customers who, unlike in the snack counters of most cinemas, would be seeking to initiate conversations with myself and other volunteers that provided me with valuable insights. On very few occasions (most of them live music

events) the bar got so busy that all my efforts would be put into serving customers and I was unable to start conversations or undertake methodical observations. However, working shifts at the bar was the majority of times an easy task to carry out because of the simplified processes in the bar, the fact that on many occasions the Brik would not reach its capacity, as well as the voluntary and laid back nature of the community. As such, after getting used to the tasks involved, I was able to concentrate on my observations and collection of unsolicited accounts.

During my time at the Brik, I found that one of the most valuable slots of being there was before the actual start of my shift. I would always arrive at least an hour before the venue was open to the public, so that I could observe the interactions amongst volunteers. Most evenings I would find between five and 20 members in the office room, either working or hanging out with one another. At the same time I would usually help out by stocking the bar, entering new members of the public to the database or tidying up.

Getting to know Brik members better has been a challenge throughout my time there for two reasons. First, the fact that the community operates with more than 250 members means that there was a high number of “peripheral” members who only show up for a shift on a casual basis (i.e. once a month) and a core of very involved members did not normally work night shifts but focus on the more responsible tasks like programming or financing, which would not take place necessarily at the same times when I was present at the Brik. As such, my contact with peripheral and core volunteers was always less frequent and I found it significantly harder to cultivate relationships with them. The type of volunteers I got to know more were the marginal participants who were present in the venue very often (some of them on an everyday basis) and were involved in a mixture of shifts and more responsible duties. Second, because of the longstanding status of many members and the already well-established relations amongst them, I found it very hard to make myself accepted in the group and involved in the discussions taking place. This was a barrier that many new volunteers encountered and that the community was well aware of. New members would often not be given a warm enough welcome during their first shifts and as a result would eventually stop volunteering, which meant that their turnover was always very high, with new inductions taking place every month or two.

While spending time at the Brik, I would never stress the fact that I was a researcher observing the group's interactions. In fact, on multiple occasions members that I worked with had no idea that I was a participant observer. However, when asked how I ended up volunteering, I would give an honest account of my presence there. Marginal members that I interacted a lot with and who knew about my role were fascinated by the fact that I wanted to study their group. Some would, on occasion, come to me to ask what I thought of them and what I was writing about. It is also worth mentioning that the legitimacy of the researcher may be challenged when particular attitudes prevail in the context. Hammersley and Attkinson (1995) refer to Brewer's (1991) experience in the field, stating that "for many police officers the word "sociologist" sounds too much like "socialist"". Diametrically opposed to this, in this case the connotations of being a marketing/management scholar were perceived to be in sharp contrast to the ethos of the studied community, despite marketing implications being outside the scope of the project. Consequently, during data collection I always highlighted the interdisciplinary and sociological aspects which characterise the research project, playing down the managerial aspects.

Some discomfort in the field (Hammersley and Attkinson 1995) due to my peripheral role was definitely present in the form of a persistent insecurity, often inability to participate in conversations or a sense of "not knowing what to do" particularly in the first months, much like a child at its first day in school. While these difficulties were never fully outgrown, my sense of comfort in the group improved simply by acquiring a better network of contacts and/or by making myself useful in the community. With the passage of time, I got more competent in my duties and was able to help out more. I ran the bar as manager, rather than staff, I was responsible for controlling the stock for the night and got more acquainted with the internal computer system. Being able to offer more, gave me the sense that I could ask for more from members and the fact that I could give back to the community was very helpful in persuading individuals to do an interview. Especially when trying to attract participants from the members' core, I felt that being an active volunteer significantly increased my chances of getting a positive response. The closest I ever felt to feeling as an included member of the group occurred, naturally, towards the last weeks of my participant observation, particularly during the very busy nights when keeping up with customers became somewhat of a challenge and

resulted in a contented feeling of “we made it collectively” at the end of the night and the sharing of stories and jokes amongst tired yet satisfied volunteers, including myself. Notably, one of the few occasions when my volunteer role overtook that of the researcher was when I was asked by one of the core members to take part in his art project, which included asking volunteers in front of a camera a number of questions, including “What is the Brik?”, “How did you get here?” and “Where are you going?”. The inversion of roles in this case (suddenly I was the interviewee and not the interviewer), brought out a reflexivity towards my volunteer role and prompted me to allow myself the enjoyment of being part of this group, not as a researcher but as a genuine member. However, the majority of my time at the Brik I felt that my role as a researcher took precedence over that of the volunteer and it is perhaps my unfamiliarity with communities of this sort and lack of relevant cultural capital that prevented me from “going native”.

My observations of the community were not limited to socialising and working shifts. Another integral part of the research was participation in the volunteer meetings, which took place every Monday, and the volunteer mailing list, an opinion exchange and decision making forum in which participation was compulsory for all members. After six months of volunteering and once I had established a relationship with one of the members of the IT team, he agreed to put me on the programming and events mailing list so I would get an insight into how decisions are made in these areas as well. Finally, given the presence of multiple subgroups within the Brik, I would on occasion participate in the film-making group, which is dedicated to making amateur short movies and clips.

6.6.4 Sampling

I completed interviews with 15 individuals. The sample included a cross section of individuals in terms of age (ranging from 25 to 64), which was representative of the span of ages that I encountered in the community. The real names of the respondents, the community as well as of any other art venues mentioned in the participants’ accounts are not disclosed and have been altered for anonymity purposes. A detailed respondent table is presented in the appendix and will be removed from any subsequent

publication of the research in order to protect internal confidentiality, in other words to avoid the traits of individual/ communities/venues making them identifiable in the thesis (Sieber 1992). Each interview was conducted in public coffee shops, lasted between 60 and 110 minutes, and was electronically recorded. There were significant differences in terms of occupations of the participants. Five of them identified themselves as artists, two as high school teachers, three as administrative assistants as well as there being an engineer, a project manager, a carer, a retired accountant and a doctoral student.

The recruitment of informants was based on a mixture of opportunistic, judgmental, and theoretical sampling (Elliott and Elliott 2003; Spiggle 1994) and can be broken down into three distinct stages. Initially I had difficulties building rapport with members so I focused on those who seemed willing to give me their time. On my third month of participant observation I conducted pilot interviews with three respondents, two of whom were marginal members with a relatively longstanding service and one of who was a new volunteer with no established status. I recruited all three of them by asking if they were willing to participate while working together on a night shift. At the time, I still felt like an outsider to the group and during the interviews my attention was entirely absorbed by looking into how volunteers use taste as a mechanism to establish their position in the complex cultural map of the city. The account of the new volunteer was very similar to mine, she viewed the Brik community as a unified whole that aims to do things differently, and shared with me her difficulties of penetrating the group. The two more experienced members, however, painted a less glorified picture of their ingroup and instead shifted the focus of my attention to an internal problematic: the common phenomenon of disputes and tensions amongst members, the existence of volunteers who “don’t get it” and the prevalence of members who they felt tried to control the group.

As I got more integrated in the community these issues started becoming increasingly visible to me, particularly through the attendance of meetings and following of discussions on the volunteers list. I was able to identify specific individuals (almost always part of the marginal or core of the group) that were often involved in heated arguments and disputes with regards to the running of the Brik. During the second stage of recruiting informants - six months into my participant observation - I focused

almost entirely on marginal members that I had built relationships with by working evening shifts and participating in sub-groups. Most of these respondents were aware of my research role. I would normally prepare the ground by informing them early on that I would be interested in interviewing them and would usually follow up with an email invitation a few weeks later. Most of them were very eager to participate, either because the interview provided a forum for them to express any frustration they felt about the community or because they simply found it entertaining to spend an hour and a half reflecting on their participation and experiences. I was also able to recruit one core member who had a personal interest in observing the social relationships amongst the community's volunteers and so was curious about my research and approach.

The third and hardest phase of recruiting informants - 10 months into my participant observation role - involved reaching out to the core members. Even though I had already built a profile on many of them – through their intense participation on the mailing list, the stories of my existing respondents and by observing them in the Brik - a lot of them still had no idea who I was. Despite the Brik having a flat hierarchy, when attempting to recruit those members I often felt that I was seeking access to the group's senior management. This was due to their longstanding status (over 8 years) and the assertiveness of most of them when it came to decision making and managing the community. Sampling for this particular group was theoretical (Dean et al. 1967), and on some occasions the rationale behind targeting specific members was to hear the “other side” of numerous stories that previous participants had shared with me. The strategy I followed was to email the members I was interested in, stressing the fact that I was a volunteer myself and pointing out that I had already interviewed multiple volunteers, in an attempt to legitimise my request and research role. At least in ten instances my emails were ignored but I got sufficient responses to start the third round of interviews. On some occasions I was given the impression that core members agreed to participate in order to give me “a clear” idea of what the community was all about and correct the potentially distorted image that may have been given to me by other participants.

6.7 Data Analysis

Some preliminary data analysis was conducted while the researcher was still in the process of collecting data (see phases one and two above), with the aim being to direct the subsequent phases of observations and interviews. Once the full dataset was collected the researcher distanced herself from the field completely, because data analysis is best conducted when the ethnographer has left the field (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). The entire dataset was transcribed by the researcher, which significantly improved familiarity with it (Braun and Clarke 2006). QRS NVivo was used to facilitate the organising of the transcripts, thematic categories and integration of the data.

The data were processed through a thematic analysis of the interviews, emails and field notes. Braun and Clarke (2006, 79) define this as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data”, that is especially pertinent when analysing material of a qualitative nature. Because of the complexity of the process of analysing the data the exact manner in which the dataset was examined is difficult to explain in full detail. The procedure followed, however, bears significant similarities to the 5-stage process suggested by McCracken (1988). Accordingly, the first round of thematic analysis was descriptive, treating each theme in its own terms and allowing the examination of a wide range of ideas, a lot of which were subsequently either collapsed into bigger category themes (e.g. romanticism as part of complying with dominant bohemian norms) or in fewer cases entirely discarded (e.g. identifying with the organisation). The second stage (corresponding to McCracken’s second and third stages) was still fairly descriptive, developing themes with further observations from the field notes or additional data collected in the process as well as occasionally re-labelling, merging or separating categories. During this phase, existing typologies (from the literature, e.g. cultural capital), indigenous typologies (from the respondents’ accounts, e.g. autonomy) and self-constructed typologies (by the researcher, e.g. exo-cultural elements) were used (Patton [1990] 2002). That is, the analysis was semi-inductive, relying both on existing categories but also allowing for new ones to emerge. During the third stage of the analysis, data was under scrutiny for patterns of consistency and contradiction. This led to their being divided into two major themes, externally-driven (inter-group) and internal (intra-group) dynamics of taste, that served

as organising categories for the writing of the findings and formed the basis of the conceptual model produced. Within these themes, axial coding (Corbin and Strauss 2008) allowed for the identification of the commonalities that linked them together. At this stage the process of writing up the analysis was also initiated. Finally and while already into the process of writing, abstraction, comparison and integration (Spiggle 1994), the data were put under further scrutiny by probing the themes through the interviews and field notes that made up the dataset one last time and verifying the identified relationships amongst them.

6.8 Credibility and Transferability

Given the constructionist foundations of the project, evaluation criteria used traditionally under positivist philosophy, including validity, reliability and generalizability are deemed inappropriate in assessing trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba 1985) and instead, the study's credibility and transferability are examined.

Credibility was achieved by prolonged engagement of the researcher with the community of enquiry (Wallendorf and Belk 1989). This was naturally constrained by time limitations of the doctoral programme, but the focus of the engagement was quickly directed to particular social situations in the context (defining "us" in relation to "them" and intra-group tensions), which allowed for a thick description (Geertz 1973) of how the phenomena of interest were present in the group. Prolonged engagement also provided sufficient depth of understanding of the community to accurately direct the interviews and contextualise the narratives of the interviewees (for example when a particular situation was described by a respondent the researcher was able to ask for additional information/clarifications having personally observed the situation). Credibility was also achieved by triangulating data (Wallendorf and Belk 1989) pertaining to observations, interviews, emails exchanged in the mailing lists and unsolicited accounts. In particular unsolicited accounts operated as informal member checks, since the researcher had the opportunity to "test" interpretations derived from observations and interviews in this way.

Specificity and extremity of context often evoke the critique of lack of generalizability in ethnographic research. However “the extremity of variables and values enables researchers to derive theoretical insights” (Arnould, Price and Moisio 2006). From this standpoint, rather than focusing on generalizability, it is more important to establish whether the results of the study are transferable to other social situations. This is achieved by abstracting and theorising context specific data so that they are applicable to alternative contexts. That is, constructions stemming from the research can be appraised “for their fit or the extent to which they “work”, that is, provide a credible level of understanding; and are relevant and modifiable” (Guba and Lincoln 1989, 179). Theory generated from this study was often appraised for its “fit” in other contexts (e.g. by considering the extent to which it could be applicable to religious groups and even academic ones, such as the consumer culture theory community of practice) and the ultimate aim is to provide a framework that could potentially increase understanding of taste-making in various types of communities of practice (e.g. neo-tribes, subcultures, brand communities etc).

6.9 Limitations

The chosen methodology, as is the case with all methodologies, presents some limitations which are discussed below.

First, the problem of criteria (Schwandt 1994) poses the question of whether accounts provided from the study are the accounts of the researcher, solely from her relative point of view. However, in all ethnographic accounts, veracity, or in other words conformity with the truth, cannot be absolute (Stewart 1998). The data which ethnographers use is argued to be a “product of their participation in the field rather than a reflection of the phenomenon studied, and/or is constructed in and through the process of analysis and the writing of ethnographic accounts” (Hammersley 1992, 2). This manifests an underlying tension in ethnographic research between the “naturalism characteristic of ethnographers' methodological thinking and the constructivism and cultural relativism that shape their understanding of the perspectives and behaviour of the people they study” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 11). The argument is that ethnographers use rhetorical devices to construct an account of their research. However, whilst not

claiming objectivity, the variety of sources used (observations, interviews, unsolicited accounts and online communication) shows the reader that there was a level of consistency between the different sources of data.

Second, textual representations in qualitative research have been criticised for leading to the belief that “the world is rather simpler than it is (...) in other words we are confronted with a crisis of authority which tells us the world is “this way” when perhaps it is some other way, or many other ways” (Lincoln and Guba 2003, 284). The way things are is really just “the sense we make of them” (Crotty 1998, 64) and any account of theory formation is partial, located and screened through the researcher’s eye/I (Kondo 1990). Under this optic, description and narration are not representative of reality but entail merely reporting how something is seen. This study constitutes a report of how taste is constructed within a given community and the researcher accepts that she has been involved in the construction of a particular interpretation of the events observed and subjectively directed the focus on specific aspects of the environment and people that were observed.

Indeed, data in this report is presented in a way that does not faithfully represent “reality” and is “artificially” broken down into different categories of the dynamics of taste-making, that in real life situations work in parallel and complex ways. This, however, was a necessary step in order to present the data in a comprehensive manner. In an attempt to avoid an oversimplified representation of the community, the data analysis moves from the parts (findings chapters) to the whole (discussion chapter), offering insights into the different identified dynamics, but concluding with an integrative conceptual framework that aims to present the “big picture” of the data.

Third, with regards to the data collection methods, what needs to be acknowledged is that working as a volunteer was a task that was time consuming and distracting from participant observation. This is an understandable limitation but a price worth paying in exchange for backstage access. In addition, the observed context proffered a vast number of phenomena and social situations being available for study, many of which were purposefully ignored in order to focus on the particular aims that the data collection was set on fulfilling as well as owing to time limitations.

7. Inter-Group Dynamics of Taste: Maintaining Boundaries and Proclaiming Distinction

During the first four months of volunteering at the Brik, my field notes were very much preoccupied with examining how an etic look on the group gives the impression of a unified whole characterised by a strong “anti-establishment” sentiment. It is clear to me that despite advocating the importance and research negligence of heterogeneity within consumption collectives throughout the previous chapters, the Brik community is certainly held together by some level of shared understanding amongst members as to “who we are”. The construction of this understanding is facilitated by the use of “them” as a focal point for comparisons, which as expected is on almost every occasion proclaiming the sovereignty of the ingroup. I should clarify upfront that the division of dynamics of taste into inter-group and intra-group that I have used to structure the findings chapters, is an artificial one. Dynamics of taste, whether externally influenced to constitute a response to “them”, or internally driven as a result of negotiations and reconciliation of conflicts, influence taste-making simultaneously and are closely interconnected. However, by distinguishing between the two, in the first two findings chapters (7 and 8) I am able to focus on the ambivalence of “us and them”, without the preoccupation of internal heterogeneity, following the example of previous studies on consumption collectives that have chosen to set aside the tensions within “us” in favour of studying other phenomena. In the third findings chapter (9) I focus on the influence of intra-group tensions on taste-making, accounting at the same time for the external influence of “them”. The discussion chapter reconciles the internal/external divide in a single conceptual framework.

Taking into account the fact that the community studied is legally a worker cooperative, it comes as no surprise that the participants’ discourse incorporates all three elements of a social movement’s ideology: identity and self-representation, opposition towards an adversary and the indication of goals (Touraine 1981 cited by Kozinets and Handelman 2004). As anticipated, the findings reveal that members can operate in the community due to their shared understanding of what distinguishes them from a variety of dissociative groups, primarily various types of art venues that operate

in the city and their audiences, and in addition to this art subcultures and in some cases society as a whole. This is expressed in a series of “sayings” and “doings” juxtapositions, centred on the notions of autonomy, radicalism, romanticism, anti-commerciality, nobility of joint enterprise and sovereignty of publics, that set identity boundaries for the group and provide the coordinates for taste-making.

As it will be exhibited later, while the findings reveal that group practices are the result of a taste regime (Arsel and Bean 2013) that renders both who constitutes a dissociative actor, as well as the manner in which distinction from these actors is best reinforced, they also open up the possibility that scarcity of resources is an equally important force in determining the group’s position within the domain. I distinguish between the two processes by arguing that in the first case it is a particular normative system that drives practice, while in the second, practice is constrained by the availability of resources, significantly limiting the power of the normative system. In the latter case the taste regime acts as a “mediator” that legitimises “doing” by concealing resource-imposed limitations in the process of taste-making. In both cases, however, the end result - meaning symbolic demarcation from outsiders - is the same. In agreement with Wenger (1998), the findings also demonstrate the existence of not just one but multiple joint enterprises. Members alternate between different enterprises each time they attempt to express the ingroup’s distinction, while simultaneously interchanging the dissociative actors that constitute the focal point in juxtapositions. In other words, the participants constantly modify the field boundaries within which they compete for status. The chapter also demonstrates how the community uses its publics and their possessed cultural capital as “evidence” of the community’s status, as well as the publics of dissociative others and their assumed lack of cultural capital as a reservoir of resources to further enforce symbolic boundaries with “them”. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the etic understanding of what constitutes “us” becomes reified and visible to members and their publics through the conspicuous absence of known practices of the dissociative groups, the conspicuous presence of appropriated practices of others and the redefinition of aesthetic categories. The latter will be discussed in more detail in the chapter 8.

7.1 Complying with Dominant Bohemianism Norms

It has become clear to the reader by now that the community of practice investigated in this project for its negotiation of (dis)taste bears resemblance, at least in part, to the 19th century bohemian movement and subsequent bohemian-inspired movements that flourished after the second world war, including the Beat generation of the 1950's, countercultures of the 1960's (even though in contrast to subcultures, bohemia has been primarily conceptualised outside of class [Brake 1987]) and the hippies of the 1970's. As Lloyd (2006) argues, the bohemian model is thematic rather than dogmatic, in a sense that there is no standard system of rules to be followed by a bohemian community, but rather transportable schemes that can be adapted in different periods or places. In any case “la vie bohème” supports the notion that “to produce art requires a commitment not only to the practical activity of creation but also to the artistic style of life” (52).

Indeed, during my time at the Brik I became increasingly aware that it is not solely the choice of art to be displayed on walls, programming of quirky films and invitation of provocative performers that is distinguishing the community from other art venues, nor is it the tired building that stands in direct comparison with the neat and polished cinemas that one can find in the city. It is equally, and perhaps even more importantly, the community's *management style*, including its organisational structure, decision making and informal policies that proclaim distinction. On this note, I revisit Silvia Gherardi's (2009, 563) approach to collective taste (see section 5.3) that offers an all-encompassing account of the construct by defining it as a “preference for the way members do things together” and a constant preoccupation as to what is the “correct” way of practising. Studies on taste have looked at how “good taste” is evoked in the material (Bourdieu 1984), its meaning and interpretation (Holt 1998), its actualisation and performance (Hennion 2001, 2004, 2007) and in the normative system underlying all of these (Arsel and Bean 2013). However, when looking at the micro social level of a collective, it can be seen that the role of the inevitably present *management style* adopted by the group and its relation to taste has been marginalised. Moreover, while it may seem somewhat odd to discuss how taste can be actualised through management styles, one should remember that beauty is ascribed to all the things we admire, the things we consider of good quality, “worthy” or even “ethical”. Woodward and

Emmison (2001) in particular have found that “judgements of taste are not only understood as a question of aesthetics but they are also matters of moral, ethical and communal sensibility” (296). In relation to this, and as Gherardi (2009) notes, a mathematician can consider his solution to an equation to be “beautiful”. From a similar standpoint, management science has in recent years shown some, yet embryonic, interest in the importance of aesthetics in the *running* of organisations (Strati 1992; 1999; 2008; 2009, 2010), whereas the aesthetics of the *running* of consumption collectives have been rather neglected by marketing scholars.

Similarly to bohemian artists, whose normative system not only directs individuals towards the production of meaningful art, but also towards leading the life of an artist, the findings reveal a compliance of (dis)tastes at the Brik to dominant bohemianism norms, that revolve not only around the material and its interpretation, but also the performative and normative aspects of what it means to be an avant-garde collective. In addition to this, an emerging dimension that is evident throughout the analysis is the *management* of practice as yet another way to actualise (dis)tastes and comply with bohemian norms.

7.1.1 Being Autonomous

One of the key characteristics of the community is its rejection of any form of support from external organisations and especially its negation of any external funding. The autonomy created from this informal policy generates a shared feeling of pride amongst the participants. Pride, however, is not drawn from the financial independence enjoyed by the group and its ability to survive economically relying solely on the income that can be generated from selling tickets. Most importantly, pride is the result of what financial independence means for the decision making of the group and eventually for the chosen forms of art to be displayed. The fact that members can decide over what films to showcase, what bands to book and what kind of art to put on the walls without constraints or any form of supervision from external parties, authenticates the practices of the community by generating meanings of freedom, risk-taking, showcasing art “for art’s sake” and ultimately enhancing the perception of being amongst peers. Not

surprisingly, the role of other arts organisation as a focal point for juxtapositions in the way that the finances of the community are managed is evident in the accounts below:

“Anyone who has ever been involved in trying to get funding, arts council funding, it tends to create an atmosphere where people are second guessing what will get funding so it subtly shapes the culture. If you know certain things are more likely to get funding even if not consciously, you start doing those things *trying* to get funding. And so it is really refreshing that this organisation says fuck that, we are not having *anything* to do with that, we will just do genuinely what we want. So you know I think the Brik with all its problems is still a genuinely autonomous arts institution which is really really rare. Very very rare.” (Patrick)

Patrick condemns the funding culture prevailing in the arts because of the ability of funding bodies to “control”, in direct or indirect ways, the activities of arts organisations. As is the case with any type of funding, getting financial help for an arts institution means adapting to the likes and requirements of your sponsor. Having been employed by an arts institution before myself, I have experienced first-hand the compromises required when trying to attain external financial help. Similarly to what Patrick describes, funding applications often scrap the artistic endeavours of the organisation to accommodate the goals of the funding body instead. From this standpoint, any arts organisation receiving such help is, to an extent, reduced to “executing” someone else’s culture.

Autonomy in programming is a key principle of the Brik community. The financial instability that is generated from this informal policy reproduces the myth of the “penniless yet artistically striving” bohemian artist who resists the marketization of his work by rejecting commissioned projects and only actualising what his or her artistic genius dictates. Negation of this “established practice” that is commonly encountered in the arts domain, enables participants to feel superior to outgroups, not only because of the rarity of the policy that they adopt, but also because of the connotations that the policy generates for the kind of art that the group chooses to showcase. Juxtapositions with outgroups in this case do not relate to the material (this film or this band versus

that film or that band) nor to its actualisation (e.g. watching a movie in 35mm film rather than digital), but to the decision making underlying the showcasing of art. It is the “how we decide about practice” that carries the positive connotations of freedom and free will, that in turn implies that “our offering is chosen out of passion and is not imposed to us” and as such is genuine and authentic. Following Beverland and Farrelly’s (2010) work on the relationship between goals and authenticating acts, it is the focus on the *intent* behind decision making that prescribes both the practice and its outcome with meaning.

Another significant constraint imposed on arts organisations that attain external funding is the mandatory achievement of specific goals, particularly in terms of maintaining audience numbers and reaching out to new audiences. One way for funding bodies to evaluate the success of an arts organisation is by measuring admissions and while there is some merit in directing funding to those institutions that are doing better in pure “number” terms, this inevitably affects the programming of the institution. Brik participants explain to me that on many occasions the Sandbox¹, will mostly showcase “marquee names” of independent cinema because this is safe ground for them. The Sandbox recently secured funding for three years (circa £750,000 per year) as part of the ACE’s (Arts Council England) new portfolio. While this may be good news in terms of financial stability, job opportunities and development of various sorts of artistic talent, the organisation will need to produce some sort of value in exchange, part of which will be measured by engaging more audiences and if its management knows that there is one there for marquee names, then that is what they are going to show.

Consequently, members of the community feel that breaking free from attaining externally set goals makes their (programming) choices pure and agentic. In the words of one of the respondents:

“That [no funding policy] comes from people wanting to do things their own way and not become accountable to like national, social or economic or cultural norms. And the less you are dependent on people

¹ Independent multiplex cinema and cultural venue located in the same city

from outside the more scope you have to do things your own way”
(Billy)

Operating independently becomes a project in progress that extends far outside attaining funding. The meanings that members attach to this conspicuous independence - idealism, creativity, rejection, purity - are elements common amongst bohemian-like cultures and project a narcissism often encountered in counter-cultures.

“From getting the posters done for the Brik for a gig night to the whole computer system... We have own server, that is extremely unusual, and it is just quite interesting to see how.... the social group can function essentially doing it for ourselves with very little input from outside organizations. I think we do have a bit of fascination with how far you can take that and how well you can function without outside input”
(Frances)

The narcissistic empowerment attained from operating independently becomes a goal to be achieved and a point to be proven collectively. All elements of practice are scrutinised for alternative ways of performing them that keeps the group in line with the goal of complete independence. That is, members will challenge one another as to what is the most appropriate (tasteful) way of carrying out a practice and will weigh the different options available in each case. For example, when a smaller group of members decided to start a monthly podcast to discuss the forthcoming programme and news relevant to the Brik and the local community, the participants present at the kick-off meeting debated using SoundCloud as their web posting base for uploading the podcasts. Soon, disagreements from some members who rejected the proposal arose, with the argument behind those opposing the proposal being based on the idea that if the group has the technology and ability to do this in-house then there is no need to rely on propriety software.

In this case, the manner in which the podcast is *actualised* increases its status. In other words, while the content of podcast recordings would be the same whether the group decided to use an external platform or rely on in-house technology, the different process of attaining the end result in the two cases infuses the outcome with meanings

that are of grave importance to its producers. In the same way, the point of juxtaposition with external actors not only concerns what the group produces and consumes, but places the weight in the *how* of the production and consumption process, thus verifying Hennion's (2001) argument that the process of actualisation does in itself define taste.

The lack of external constraints further increases the feeling of belonging of members, by allowing them to question not only the tastes exhibited by other organisations, but most importantly the goals driving those tastes. The formal organisational structure of arts institutions and concern for financial prosperity and reputation, become points of criticism for the ingroup, for while financial viability is still important for the Brik community, it is treated as a mere necessity that has to be dealt with in order to pursue more noble goals. As such, the decision making of the group, free from external constraints, can be based on a shared understanding of what is "good taste" prompted by collective mastery of similar cultural capital, that as Bourdieu thoroughly demonstrates in *Distinction* (1984) increases the feeling of belonging of members and their sense of what it means to be one of "us".

"Say the Burgundy² or even somewhere like Land's End³, obviously you got to persuade the administration of that organisation of what you think is a good idea and that administration is not your peer group, it's a hierarchy that has its own value system and own ideas about you know...and then they have different criteria for putting on things. They wouldn't put on things which wouldn't reflect well on their institution. They have different criteria, value criteria, to the Brik where the people you have to persuade something is a good idea are basically your peers and are your equals" (Patrick)

Members attempt to authenticate their performances in relation to the prevalence of bureaucratic structures in other arts organisations and the fact that the practices of dissociative others means they are held prisoners to a structure that restricts decision making and the actualisation of practice. This places an emphasis not only on the actualisation of practice, but also to the structure that gives birth to it. The fact that

² The Burgundy is a local art gallery/exhibition space of international reputation

³ Land's End is a local contemporary arts venue of international reputation

programming choices in the community are made collectively by a group of people of the same idiosyncrasy, rather than being imposed by few senior members who attain to their own (or to externally set) goals, affects the perceived status of the exhibited choices. Tastes that are the result of a cooperative structure are perceived as agentic and genuine while those that are imposed by a team of a few are seen as instrumental and serving a sinister purpose.

Moreover, while achieving externally-set goals is not a concern for the group, abiding by their own informally set rules faithfully becomes a matter of extreme significance. Authentication of acts fulfilled through the maintenance of the community's autonomy, is only valuable when the normative system is followed religiously, for going astray from what the regime dictates, can jettison the authenticity of the practice, threatening to reduce the group to the level of dissociative others:

“We are quite unique in being a completely volunteer run organisation that *as a matter of principle* (emphasis) does not take funding, does not take government funding. I have been involved in a film cooperative before where three of the staff there were paid....they created three paid positions and from that the whole kind of...the cooperative nature of the organisation kind of collapsed. Because as soon as you have three people being paid suddenly it somehow kind of professionalises, marketises the whole ideology behind the organisation.” (Jake)

7.1.2 Being Radical

Similarly to what the bohemian tradition dictates, the community's joint enterprise directs members towards programming choices that are there to serve a purpose, i.e. provoke thinking and reflection and operating collectively in a manner that stands out from the norm. This shared understanding of the common purpose is underlined by a hostility to and alienation from societal norms and is producing meanings of radicalism. Taste, in this case, is directed by a regime that calls for the cultivation of a “cultural revolution” that challenges the mainstream view of the purpose that the arts and entertainment should serve. This regime is explicitly stated in the community's website:

“We aim to offer alternatives and make a difference - in our programming and in the way we trade”. Meanings of radicalism are realised through taking pride in being (one of) the first communities of its kind to operate in the area, thereby provoking the mainstream order through its way of operation and experimenting with programming choices.

The Brik is located in a mainly residential area, which neighbours an artistically renowned bohemian district. The district is home to multiple activist groups and famous for its colourful, mural-painted streets and multiplicity of art galleries and art bars. The Brik is often mistakenly referred to as being part of that district’s scene (despite this not being true in strict geographic terms), both by its publics and by the press, much to the annoyance of volunteers, who have on occasions rushed to correct the mistake. The reason behind such a negative reaction is to be traced in the shared belief that the Brik “got there first”, and was able to operate radically, survive and develop, even at a time when the environment did not facilitate the existence of such groups. Neil explains to me that while a lot of Brik members hang out in the bohemian district and engage in a multiplicity of activities there, the group does not like to identify with the scene:

“I think we are quite proud that we were here before all that... different views, the majority of people feel that it is restrictive”. (Neil)

Neil not only highlights that the existence of the community precedes the development of the artistic quarter, proclaiming the superiority of the Brik in terms of originality and risk-taking, but also rejects the goals of the quarter as “too restrictive”. Indeed, while the descriptions of the Brik I have provided so far in this project point towards some forms of activism and a specific political orientation (manifested in the goals underlying the group’s joint enterprise, the physical building hosting the community, programming and associated groups, including Indymedia holding a monthly event in the Brik and the local Occupy movement being allowed to use the premises for free), on many occasions members reassured me that while political through their manner of operation and the cooperative nature of the community, the group has no specific political preferences and that heavy handed political ideas sit very uneasy with the majority.

The reasons behind this rejection may partly be traced to the community’s effort to

distance itself from the openly left-wing orientation of the bohemian district's scene, the symbols and practices of which, however, have in the past few years been increasingly co-opted by the market. The area is in itself an example of a neighbourhood undergoing gentrification. Development agencies, businessmen and affluent "outsider" consumers who are looking to buy into the lifestyle projected by it, threaten and damage the authenticity of its radicalism. By "othering" the community from the neighbourhood and its political orientation, members manage to retain an independence from a scene whose alternativeness is becoming more and more "fashionable", much to the distaste of its early attendees.

"The branding of the 'area' by some activist groups has been undertaken in earnest maybe, but more and more it looks like an empty and shallow emotional solipsism unable to regulate its use of the street as a canvas. The area is just filling with people trying to feather their own nests or jump on the cash booster bandwagon. Interestingly The Brik doesn't feel it has been hugely effected by the influx, for better or worse"

Distancing themselves from the "infected" area, allows members to maintain that their practices are *genuinely* radical and unaffected by the market and its commercial purposes.

As Max states:

"The aim isn't to have lots of people in the auditorium and lots of money coming in. It is great if that happens but that shouldn't be the end. The end should be to do something extraordinary culturally and to provide something that isn't provided elsewhere. The experimentation and the creativity have been fundamental and have been really passionately fought for. The whole thing is a kind of a provocation in a kind of macro sense. You are encouraged to go play with stuff, figure out how it works, unplug things, plug things back in. And I think that is quite good when it works, people are quite scared of it but yeah. It is not like going to the Sandbox or something. So it is a space that by its nature encourages, hopefully encourages, this sort of questioning response" (Max)

Max highlights that people locked in the wrong mindset are afraid of experimentation as well as that art venues, whose purpose, at least in part, should be to “push limits”, do not provide that sort of stimulation to their publics. From this standpoint, part of the Brik’s joint enterprise is to provide opportunities for its volunteers and publics to experiment and reflect. In particular, Max explains how in the Brik members perceive nothing as static, set or settled. Everything is up for alteration, testing, ruining and rebuilding, and it is this process of exploring in itself that embodies the “tasteful way” of doing things. As stated earlier, communities of practice are communities in progress (Wenger 1998); it is not only the end result that has to be evoking radicalism but also the way of attaining it. Challenging the status quo by experimenting is not aiming to reduce the status of outsiders to mundane or boring but has underlying political meanings, criticising the apathy of the crowds and the preference of other organisations and their publics to stay in their comfort zone. Apart from directing a general attitude however, radicalism is also reflected in programming choices:

“We also do film festivals sometimes, quite rarely these days but we might take a theme and then programme loads of films around those. But we try to pick films that we like and that are good films at the same time. We try to pick films that are a little bit...you are not necessarily going to see any day of the week on TV or in another cinema. So now we are trying to programme a weekend of music documentaries at the end of August and it would be very easy to programme a lot of music documentaries that everyone has seen but it is not really interesting so we are currently scouting for interesting films out there.” (Neil)

Members take pride in the effort that the group puts into programming by explaining that the “easy way” of showcasing the popular documentaries is not an option. The shifts I worked as a volunteer at the Brik involved events that similarly to what described by Neil were not accessible elsewhere and provoked thinking with regards to social phenomena -consumerism, inequality, acceptance of difference- amongst many or the challenging of perceptions, thus actualising the group’s taste for “being radical”.

7.1.3 Being Romantic

The romantic movement “borders” bohemianism in that both were born as a reaction against the intellectual trends of the 18th century, including enlightenment’s obsession with reason and logic as well as against the straight laced codes of society at the time. Romanticism is first and foremost reproduced at the Brik community through its attempt to create an egalitarian utopia. Aside from this aspect, which is to be discussed in more detail in chapter 9, the community’s nostalgia for “old cinemas” and how movie venues used to be, is exhibited in the nature of the building as well as their practices and hence makes an implicit comment on the development and nature of contemporary venues of the same domain. From the neon “Brik Cinema” sign that decorates the terrace and the old, stamp-like tickets that buyers receive in exchange for their custom, to the wooden, red velvet seats in the auditorium and the choice of snacks at the bar (limited to sesame snaps and bars of ethically traded chocolate), the Brik stands in direct comparison to all other cinemas in the city. With overstated signs (in the case of the multiplexes more than triple the size to that of the Brik), carpeted floors and choice of “inoffensive” colours, comfortable, oversized seating and multiplicity of offerings at the bar, ranging from the classic popcorn to full menu choices, the modern cinema bears no resemblance to its older days and the extended product is on many occasions overtaking the product itself.

The community is exhibiting a longing for the past and artefacts and activities associated with another time, putting forward the nostalgic “feel” that is a common trope in Romanticism. This becomes apparent in the fascination of the group with 35mm film over digital. While working at the Brik I often observed that volunteers would persistently try to get hold of the 35mm version of movies over the digital one and when this was achieved the group would always perceive the film as a “special treat”, promoting it as such. Surprisingly, this practice was avidly pursued, despite the fact that while many members are trained to project digital films, very few are trained to deal with the complexities of projecting 35mm films. Inevitably, lack of trained staff means more strain for those few that are up to the task and leads to many cancellations on nights that no 35mm projectionists can be available. When asked why the group is so attracted to 35 mm film one of my respondents explains:

“If you shot on film and you have a piece of film you can just cut it up, splice it together you know, you can do stuff like that with it, whereas if you got a DCP unit and it’s a closed, locked box basically, it is like a hard drive that comes from the distributor, you bang it into the player and it is all encoded. You cannot get into it, you cannot do anything with it, it is completely propriety and it is just really restrictive. There is something a bit sinister about it I think, and also practically it costs a lot of money to get a digital set up and also the format changes constantly, whereas you can have a 35mm projector that you can keep for 80 years as long as you keep it maintained. But I think aesthetically film looks nicer, looks more natural, I mean it is more natural, it is exposed film. I don’t know there is just something about film, I guess something about looking back to the past” (Neil)

Neil emphasizes the tactility of 35mm film over the restricted nature of digital. Similarly to what was discussed earlier, the ability to “experiment” and properties that make an item or practice “playful” are favoured by the group. In our discussion Neil was also highly critical of the multiplexes that rely solely on automatic digital projections and noted that to him, the absence of “a living soul” from the projection room creates a feeling of being in a post-apocalyptic, soulless world. Similarly to previous accounts, the authenticity of the romantic practice is always assigned as “in comparison” to what dissociative others do.

7.2 De-Fetishizing the Domain

In this section I examine how community members construct a sense of “us” by drawing upon an anti-commercialist regime that directs their practice. Consumers often “choose to define themselves in opposition to the dominant consumer culture” (Dobscha 1998, 91). Bourdieu (1984, 220), in particular, refers to “ostentatious poverty” to describe the symbolic subversions of rituals that aim to challenge dominant lifestyles. Embracing a similar approach, the findings demonstrate the group’s rejection of any “respect for forms” that exhibit an unashamed relationship to luxury or comfort, prioritising function (as opposed to form) and de-fetishising in the process the

entertainment field. In many ways the Brik bears similarities to a counter-culture. Members consider the community and its presumption properties a reaction and response to “packaged” entertainment and the society of the spectacle. The fact that they can walk in the community, make a film, show it, make their own theatre, blurring the boundaries between the traditional “money-making” producer and the paying consumer, is key to their sense of identity.

As described extensively in section 6.6.1, the building that hosts the Brik is significantly dilapidated. Upon arrival, you enter a site that with the exception of the neon sign placed on the terrace could well be a warehouse or small industrial building. You have learned about the Brik from three possible sources: word of mouth, a search for particular movies/events on the internet or you have come across a programme leaflet distributed by Brik members in selected cafes, galleries, record stores and bars in the city. Upon arrival, you can never expect that a film or event will start at the time advertised on the website. At times, you might even arrive at the venue only to realise that there was a last minute cancellation (usually due to understaffing, untimely receipt of a movie from the distributor, technical problems or no available projectionist to volunteer on the night). On most of these occasions, however, you won’t be turned away. You might be invited in to watch an alternate movie for free or if this is not possible, you will be offered a free cup of tea and a friendly chat for making your way down to the venue. This is not a marketing ploy to avoid “disappointing the customer”, but a warm welcome to the community and an indication that the space is not just an entertainment venue but a place to socialise.

If the planned event goes ahead as normal, sitting in the cinema hall for two or more hours is a small adventure in its own right. The creaking seats are a striking contrast to what you usually get in the local multiplexes and performance venues. The floor, in all likelihood, has not been swept for days and the air smells of damp. During the winter, the radiators do not suffice to warm up the hall, but you won’t be left freezing as volunteers will provide you with a blanket and a free cup of tea. You look around to see the most bizarre image: an auditorium filled with an audience covered in blankets. If you are down for a movie night, it may be that upon start-up there are problems with the visuals and projection may stop and restart few times. The audience may clap to encourage the projectionist who eventually comes out of the projection room to explain

what seems to be the problem and more often than not the problem gets resolved in the end. But there is something odd about this whole sequence of events taking place in the auditorium. The blankets, tea mugs, friendly chats with the usher and other volunteers and the projectionist trying to manage the issues that he or she encountered, make you feel that you are at a friend's pad for a night-in, rather than in an arts venue. In fact, you are well aware that any of these "mishappenings" would never occur in the majority of the entertainment venues you usually go, and if they did, they would be dealt with as "major deficiencies", but not at the Brik.

I tried to uncover the reasons why at least some of these issues are not dealt with and most importantly to understand the success of the Brik despite the mishaps. Robbie, who is a newbie, confirms what I already suspected, that the community operates under these conditions by choice and for what the group considers to be good reasons:

"There is a feeling that this is how it should be kept. They (the other volunteers) don't want to make it look too nice or clean because that is not really the feel or the atmosphere of the Brik. I think its messiness attracts people. It is like a worn in feeling, it's comfortable. It's not in any way pretentious, it is what it is..." (Robbie)

It becomes clear to me that the messiness and clutter of the space are valued not necessarily because members enjoy operating under these particular conditions, but because of a subtle comparison that they provoke to the environment of other venues, characterised in Robbie's account as "pretentious". Such juxtapositions come to the surface in other participants' accounts:

"As far as the Sandbox experience is concerned, you phone up in the Sandbox and you get somebody who always asks you exactly the same stuff on the phone and it is like 'I want to see such and such'.. They don't really chat with you on the phone, they are just somebody doing their job and then they will say 'right ok... so which showing you want to come to? Can you get your card out, give me your card number details? blah blah blah... I hope you enjoy the film'. You know, that is basically what you get there. And then you go along, there may be

somebody ushering but you are not going to chat to them, they are just doing their job again. And you do get that feeling that everything is overtly organised within there. And I know they have a cafe but the cafe is not *that* inviting to chat, especially with strangers... Whereas at the Brik it is like: you phone up, you might get somebody at the office, you might not (laughs), they might not know what the films is or they might be able to chat to you for hours about it. You have to go down and pay by the door, you get that funny ticket and then if you are a smoker you go outside to the garden and meet other smokers and people hanging out there, drinking or whatever, and possibly chat to somebody there. And then you go in to see a film and maybe there is a delay before it is shown or there is a breakdown half through the film (laughs)...you know... as I say it might not even be open so you have all these things that are...well they are not ideal in terms of ... in a strange sort of way it gives you a good feeling. It is a friendly feeling.” (Jake)

The picture painted of the community in the account is that of a clumsy-yet-likeable character. Jake prioritises function over form by recognising that the “malfunctions” of the community do not represent optimum conditions, they do, however, serve a more important purpose: they build up a friendly atmosphere for the community. He describes the experience in the local independent multiplex as “packaged” and mundane by focusing on the overtly organised processes, impersonal manner of staff and uninviting environment. Jake also highlights the commercial side of other organisations by referring to the paid staff members of the Sandbox, implying that Brik participants give their time voluntarily to engage in the exact same duties out of their passion and not for monetary rewards. The comparison between the two venues is based on the well-known rhetoric of the over-fetishisation of products and services that facilitates the group to differentiate themselves from “others” by de-fetishising the movie experience. Applying Binkley’s (2008) argument on “fetished de-fetishization” of commodities, one could also argue that Brik members share “a taste for” unmasking the artificiality of commodified entertainment, with the aim of “uncovering its intrinsic humanity and naturalistic sociability” (602). Unlike in commoditized venues where the visitor experience is the same every time, a night out in the Brik is never the same because it is dependent on the personalities of the people that happen to be working shifts on any

given night, as well as on the unpredictable factors that will affect the evening, bringing the human element to the forefront of the visit. This general disorganisation may be perceived as a weakness by some, but members will argue that it is primarily a strength that demarcates the community from the distasteful, bureaucratic practices of commercial spaces.

While members of the community interpret the chaotic nature of the space and services as a response to the over-commerciality of other venues, I could not help but wonder how the audience reacts to this offering. Neil explains:

“The audience understands that we have problems. You know, we got a fairly old building with moths in it and we got a broken wall in the bar. Sometimes the projector breaks. And a lot of the audience recognise that. I think they quite like it. The number of times that we haven’t been able to get a film started and the audience just laughs. They kind of give you a round of applause and a cheer and you come out and apologise. And I think people like that because it’s the human touch which we don’t get in the multiplexes or anywhere else. People are quite forgiving.” (Neil)

Members believe that the audience is not only patient and understanding when it comes to services not functioning properly, but is even appreciative of the incidents because the “human touch” of the Brik is juxtaposed to the robotic practices of the multiplexes. While the overtly organised procedures of other venues usually mean that no mistakes are made, for Brik volunteers, making mistakes is part of human nature, something that the audience understands and can empathise with, and so operating in an amateur mode does not put people off but is on the contrary a major point of differentiation, contributing to brand-building against local actors. These views are verified in a user comment under an online article discussing the Brik:

“Went here for a screening once - they hadn't had the reels delivered or something - so they put on a free screening of the latest foreign Oscar winner (some Argentinian film if I remember correctly), with free mugs of tea! Only at the Brik!”

Many participants criticise the picture-perfect image put forward by the multiplexes:

“It is like... you go in... They are the worst (the multiplexes) to be honest, everything is really stuck together you know. And it is all brand new and glistening and gleaming. And you get big nice seats I suppose but is that why you are in the cinema? And so, it is just utterly soulless to my mind. Utterly lacking soul.” (Jake)

“It is really weird because the Brik is held together with blue-tack and Sellotape and yet when I go to the multiplexes, everything is clean and well-polished and yet I get the feeling that it isn’t... I almost get the opposite feeling that there is no care there. There is like a surface but no real care.” (Lisa)

Jake and Lisa dismiss the comforts of the multiplexes as less important to the main offering of art venues: the art in itself. Exhibiting contemptuousness against the “new and gleaming” décor of these spaces, Jake prompts me to think of the function, what people really go to the cinema for, dismissing the extended product offered by the multiplexes: big lights, bright colours, fake plants, identically replicated seating areas and shiny floors. The “inoffensive” ambience of those venues is characterised as lacking any human qualities and care while the fetishisation of the experience neglects what should be the essence of the cinema.

At this stage it should be noted that it is not surprising that this particular discourse on lifestyle and authenticity mediates the group’s sociability and collective orientation. Binkley (2008), in his work on Liquid Consumption explores how oppositional groups develop collective orientations by using consumption as “the object of a social movement aimed at any of several objectives” (600). In support to this argument, the findings show that social bonds facilitated by anti-commercialist discourse constitute a “Prêt-à-Porter ” sociability for consumers permanently on the move (602) and may be a useful base for the community given its quick turnover of members. It becomes an instant point of contact for anyone who joins and a clear cut signal to the outside world as to who we “are” and what tastes are deemed to be acceptable. As Adorno and

Rabinbach (1975, 14) have argued, “the technique of the culture industry is, from the beginning, one of distribution and mechanical reproduction, and therefore always remains external to its object”. In this case, members reclaim the connection between the object of art and its reproduction by creating an experience which is skilfully rejecting the industry’s way as distasteful.

7.3 Taste Regimes and Resource Limitations

Applying Arsel and Bean’s (2013) theorisation of taste as regime to the analysis above, one could argue that members of the community use an anti-commercialist discourse as the normative system that orchestrates their practices. I now, however, want to address another side of this argument. Multiple practices that members engage in that I have described earlier - from the creative compensation offered to the public when the programme cannot go ahead as scheduled and the amendments made when the weather is too cold, to the messiness of the space and interface of the website - and which inarguably form part of the tastes that the Brik community represents and of the public’s etic understanding of it, are, to one extent or another, influenced by a distinct lack of physical and economic resources that characterises many voluntary collectives. In other words, at some point during my analysis the question I asked myself was: to what extent do participants embrace anti-commercialist tastes because they are guided by this particular normative system and to what extent are these tastes enforced by lack of resources?

For a moment let’s assume that it is not the anti-commercialist ideology nor the bohemian influences that drive these practices, but it is lack of adequate resources (i.e. no budget to refurbish the seating or to maintain/add radiators). If anything, this is a safe assumption to make, not only because of the limited financial capital of the group, but also because of the voluntary nature of the collective. The latter means that members are not in any way obliged to help out during an understaffed event (which can lead to closures or in the case of non-availability of 35mm projectionists it may mean that an alternative, non-scheduled film is put on) and members are solely trained on the very basics of providing service to customers, which combined with the absence of a formal code of conduct, means lack of consistency of the experience, which then becomes

dependent on the personality of the volunteers working on the night (bringing to the forefront the praised “human” character of the Brik). To continue, the strictly no external funding policy means that the only financial resources available are those coming in from the public attending events, which are usually just sufficient to cover the basic expenses of running the community: fixed costs including rent, bills, recycling services, alcohol license fees, council tax etc and variable costs including the payment of performers, movie distributors and last but not least any essential maintenance that cannot be carried out by volunteers themselves. Consequently, it is not unreasonable to explore the possibility that lack of human and financial capital may, at least in part, be driving taste-making.

In this scenario, where does the anti-commercialist normative system come into play? Inarguably, members’ narratives on art for art’s sake, freedom, romanticism and radicalism, are in place to legitimise the practices of the group and elevate their status in relation to that of outgroups. From their standpoint, calling the Brik to find out about the programme and running the risk of getting no proper response, waiting into a cold auditorium covered in a blanket, for the projectionist to deal with any technical problems that have unexpectedly arose and sitting on a creaking seat, are not perceived in a negative way, but are all experiences that give a positive “human touch” to the community. Stepping on an existing discourse on fetishisation of products and the commodification of entertainment, in particular, members achieve the social externalisation of “them” by either rejecting their robotic ways (when it comes to commercial arts organisations) or on a more sophisticated level, by criticising those outgroups for whom independence is a co-opted symbol and part of a marketing ploy.

However, going back to the theorisation of taste as “regime that drives practice”, and while in this case the anti-commercialist ideology, indeed, seems to provide a foundation for the group’s collective orientation, the manner in which it is used somewhat differs to what Arsel and Bean (2013) describe, if we take the resource limitation scenario to be at least partly true. In apartment therapy (2013), members “problematized” as to how they could align their practices with the regime’s core meanings, whilst at the Brik members “problematize” as to how they can legitimise their engagement in specific practices which are imposed by lack of resources. The solution to this problem is the *parallel* use of a normative system that allows them to

juxtapose those practices to those of dissimilar others. From this standpoint, problematisation in the first case is to do with the symbolic appropriateness of the practice, whereas in the latter this is partly pragmatic (i.e. dealing with lack of resources) and partly symbolic, involving the legitimisation of ingroup tastes and disapproval of the tastes of “them”, thus allowing for demarcation in the domain. An implications of this, in line with what was noted in section 4.2 with regards to the lack of a framework of understanding as to when rejection is conspicuous and when it is not, the distinction between anti-choice (conspicuous rejection due to avoidance, abandonment, aversion) and non-choice (inconspicuous rejection due to affordability, accessibility, availability) (Hogg 1998), is far more blurred than previously thought.

7.4 Constructing Joint Enterprise(s) by Extending Field Boundaries

I have mentioned on multiple occasions by now that the Brik community lacks a formal mission (at least in the form and function that missions are usually manifested on various organisations’ websites), yet I have repeatedly referred to the group’s joint enterprise and efforts to achieve a “common purpose”, without at any point explaining just what that enterprise might entail. Despite the fact that when speaking to participants I always got the impression that decisions in the community are made in order to achieve an unwritten, yet noble goal, none of the members was ever able to clearly articulate just what that purpose is. In the words of one of my respondents “everything (happening within the community) has to be endured within the Brik philosophy”, but when I subsequently asked what that philosophy is, responses are reduced to mere mumbling. For quite some time this is a matter that troubled me. I tried to extract an answer from all of my interviewees as well as from multiple members that I interacted with while working at the group, but never received a specific answer.

My subsequent interpretation of this is that the community does not serve a single joint enterprise but multiple ones, which means that perhaps it is not the respondents that were not able to give a proper answer but the interviewee asking the wrong kind of question. As stated earlier on - and quoting Etienne Wenger- communities of practice are communities in progress and evolution. As such, it may be unreasonable to expect collectives to follow a clearly spelled out, static common purpose and by static here, I

do not only imply that the enterprise changes as time passes by (which indeed it does), but that it changes according to the intent that members wish to serve for any particular situation and the point they wish to get across. Interestingly, it is not only the joint enterprise that changes according to which aim members wish to focus on, but also the external actors that constitute focal points for juxtaposition each time. The accounts and examples below demonstrate how the group's common purpose changes from "provoking a critical response", to "operating autonomously and collectively against all odds" and "to providing a platform for members and the public to make a difference", putting forward different aspects of the normative system followed and the values that it rejects each time. Concurrently, these accounts alternate between dissociative others that are used as focal points and that comprise of arts organisations, worker cooperatives and society as a whole, extending in the process the field boundaries within which the community competes for status. From this standpoint, tastes are dynamic because the group's joint enterprise is also so.

Naturally, and as it has been demonstrated so far on this chapter, other arts organisations constitute a major competing actor in the war of legitimisation of tastes. In this case, and going back to the group's compliance with the "being radical" bohemianism norm, the joint enterprise of the Brik is to "open up people's minds", which refers both to members' personal development and the community's publics, and to provoke a questioning response with regards to a multiplicity of contemporary social issues. This mission is widely evident in the majority of programming choices. As a volunteer, I watched numerous films and performances which were chosen for their ability to challenge perceptions, amongst these were: "Le Havre", a comedy drama about a shoe shiner who tries to save the life of an immigrant child in the French port city of the same name, "The Black Power Mixtape", a Swedish documentary about the Black Power movement in the US, "No Fun City", a documentary exploring Vancouver's underground scene and its struggle to stay alive in a city that tries to suppress it, "The Third Policeman", a postmodern play toying with the boundaries between reality and fiction, and last but not least "Qu-Junctions", a recurrent music production event that focuses on musicians that do not conveniently fall in with a recognised music pathway. Aside from programming, the set up and offering of the venue as describe earlier, are also in line with the mission of "challenging people's minds" by transforming what the cinema experience is usually about.

Volunteers believe that for other cinemas, bound to the profit making goal, showing “big bugs Hollywood movies” that are more likely to attract an audience and generate a higher turnover, makes the mission of “provoking critical thinking” irrelevant to them. They criticise their programming, citing the rarity of independent American and European movies and the almost complete absence of anything from the third world. I ask what is it that is considered so negative about Hollywood movies? Some explain to me that Hollywood ran out of steam by the end of the 70’s, producing nothing that is worth while watching after that. Others point me to “over the top special effects”, “same lame storylines” and “celebrity fixations that accompany the industry”. The greatest criticism against other art organisations is ultimately lack of experimentation. While discussing the matter, one of the participants tells me laughing: “If Orson Welles showed up in Hollywood today he wouldn’t even get a job as a clapper boy, you know what I mean?”. When it comes to blockbusters, Brik members, in the words of a participant, “would not ever dare to even suggest” them for possible inclusion in the programme. This conspicuous absence of such movies is in the members’ opinion consistent with what the joint enterprise dictates. In this case, focus on what purpose the artistic offering should fulfil, adjusts the joint enterprise to be that of provoking debate and critical thinking and directs juxtapositions towards the artistic merit and intellectual rigour, or lack thereof, of the offering of dissociative others.

During my time at the Brik I observed on more than one occasion that profit was somewhat of a “dirty word” and talks about money were only acceptable when discussing the financial viability of the community. The fact that the Brik cinema is “the cheapest in town” as manifested on the website, and that the drinks that one can purchase there are inarguably surprisingly cheap, is in itself a conspicuous statement, professing the group’s rejection of the idea that entertainment should cost a lot, but most importantly telling us what the its joint enterprise *is not*:

“As consumer of big corporations myself, I don’t feel that there is any care given to my experience. They just want my money. Which is the total opposite of what we are about. Yes, we need your money to keep going, but that is not why we are there, that is not our primary purpose. I think *that* is the Brik difference. And then so many coops will dilute the

ideology behind the movement by starting to pay two members or three who are supposedly doing the “hard work”, but by doing that you are essentially changing what this is all about.” (Neil)

Neil demarcates the mission of the Brik from that of “big corporations”, implying that it is a much nobler cause that the community serves. In this case, the purpose of “them” is informed by the capitalist order and focuses on money-making. Antithetically, the Brik uses money purely in an instrumental way, while profit-making conversations constitute a “red flag”. Neil refers to “the Brik difference” with pride, implying contemptuousness against the enterprise of other actors, proclaiming in the process the community’s sovereignty, based on what its joint enterprise *is not*. That is, the primary focal point for the juxtaposition of the nobility of the community’s mission is big organisations that the participant has experienced first-hand. There is, however, a secondary comparing actor, namely cooperative movements. In this case, the comparison with communities of a similar structure and ideological descent and the reduction of the latter to the level of big commercial organisations when they do not religiously comply to what the normative system directs, allows the group to juxtapose its enterprise and rejection of the profit making goal, not only to big corporations, which the group clearly disassociates with, but also to communities of a similar ilk. On a similar note, it is not only juxtapositions that extend outside the field of the arts but also positive comparisons:

“The organization that I think we are most like is the Women’s Institute. Because they do ... they have this cake and jam thing where they do a stall at the farmer’s market every two weeks and they are all volunteers. They get their income from... they buy the ingredients in bulk, distribute it to their members to bake cakes and they are like machines every week. The carrot cake is exactly the same, and they are more organized than the Brik. They bring it all to the market and sell it. All that money is used for their activities which is social activities and politics. They, like, lobby against big super markets and stuff. It is extraordinary!! And I think they are more like the Brik than the Sandbox because of that volunteerism” (Frances)

In this account, Frances perceives a cooperative of a similar structure and organisational culture to be closer in social space to the community than the independent multiplex. From this standpoint, the joint enterprise of the organisation is not anymore about the showcasing of radical art:

“I see the Brik as primarily a ground of how to operate collectively, that is its purpose for me, but all of the cinema and stuff that is just a kind of a pretext. So the real work is how to operate politically and socially together.” (Daniel)

The structure and operations of the Brik community, the conspicuous indifference against profit and members’ willingness to give their time voluntarily (carrying out duties that anywhere else would be financially rewarded), provide them with a feeling of superiority, fuelled by the survival and success of the community “against all odds”. The comparison quickly extends outside the boundaries of both arts organisations and the cooperative movement and members use as a focal point in their juxtapositions dominant societal ideologies and economic systems:

“Well you know the sort of...what people are pleased to call capitalists or western social democracy or whatever it is called...it is a very heartless system that works. A combination of capitalist greed and impersonal bureaucracy. And these things coexist and these are the things which people are told to buy into. Strict hierarchies and all the rest of it and if you are not making a profit then you are not doing anything, you are not even a human being (laughs) you know what I mean? And these are the values which the whole society is indoctrinated in and you get bombarded with the papers and the television, in your daily life and your work experiences is the values which they... are bombarded with. We are paralyzed from institutions and corporations, bureaucracies. So for somewhere like the Brik to work and try and make a difference is a big deal ...under all that, is great” (Jake)

Similarly to what the account indicates, the collective’s enterprise to try and “make it against all odds”, survive by rejecting what is perceived to be the dominant normative

system with which society is indoctrinated, is perceived by some members to be a noble mission. The shortcomings of other organisations, whether or not in the arts domain, are attributed to blind following of the “wrong” regime, which is quickly inducted to a regime ruling society as whole. Shifting the boundaries within which the community competes for distinction significantly strengthens the importance of its enterprise by setting aside art taste wars and bringing to the forefront a much wider ideology that is rejected by the group through its exhibition of particular preferences and ways of performing these.

7.5 Using Associative Others as “Evidence” of Distinction

It has been clear to the reader by now that by referring to “Brik members” or the “Brik community” I distinctly mean those individuals who participate both in the production and consumption of its programme and that are responsible for all the aspects that the running of the venue entails. Audience members, whether occasional or patrons, have been excluded from my definition of “community of practice”. While some of these individuals have been described to me by volunteers as “friends of the Brik” (particularly those who are often physically present at the venue and/or take an interest in news and developments), I took the decision to exclude them from my use of “community of practice” (and subsequently data collection for that matter) on the basis that they do not influence the decision making of the group in a direct or formal manner. Indirectly, however, I found that these associative groups contribute in their own way in the social externalisation of “them” by constituting a form of “human capital” that the community incorporates in its “us versus them” discourses.

First, the audiences of other art venues are often a point of criticism in the accounts of my respondents. From this standpoint, members proclaim the sovereignty of their own publics by occasionally “degrading” the audience of other arts institutions primarily on the basis of their choice to consume inferior kinds of entertainment, but also by looking down upon their cultural capital and making assumptions about their background and general lifestyle.

“Generally you would find that the people who go to the Brik are people who are thinking for themselves. The vast majority of people who go to the multiplexes are just...they are not really thinking about what they are watching, they haven't really thought about why they are watching it. It is just like a big sensation you know... so you get much more conventional people if you know what I mean. People who don't have very opened up minds generally. Not always, but that would be the predominant. Or you know, families and things like that. They are just going because they are working flat hours and then they will go to the cinema in the weekend and take the kids, and they are just going for pure escapism. They aren't going someplace to engage their minds cause their main job is probably so shit (laughs) and boring anyway, and this is just a way of escaping this and that for five minutes and then back to the boring job. So for that kind of person, locked into that mindset then the Brik is not going to have an appeal to them” (Jake)

Jake laughs and imitates people greedily galloping pop-corn while he narrates. His opinion is one widely shared in the group and assumes that the content offered by the mainstream institutions only serves the purpose of escapism and is unworthy of any critical attention. The group draws from an existing rhetoric of the postmodern era: alienated individuals aspiring for lifestyles that they will never be able to realise, left unable to “think for themselves” and looking for ways to escape their day-to-day lives. “Big bucks movies” offer to these audiences a break from their reality. In contrast, the Brik with its messy décor, amateur attitude and rejection of Hollywood fixation is serving a double purpose for its community. First, it is an unattractive choice for this kind of “mindless” audience. Second, it appeals to a different kind of punter, one that is able to “see through” the superficiality and offering of other venues and allows the community to serve the goal of further cultivating their audiences’ intellectual engagement. From this standpoint, the associative groups of the community are not only perceived as superior to those of outgroups in terms of cultural capital, but they also are also responsive to the group’s joint enterprise of provoking a questioning response and being radical.

On a similar note, discussing the audiences of the Burgundy, the theme of “superficiality” is one that often came up. A large number of art-goers are criticised by the community as “too concerned about how others see them” and “what is the correct way of behaving in any given circumstance”. Some participants mock them as “status obsessed people” who hang out in art galleries in order to be seen at posh arts, trendy arts institutions and that big contemporary organisations are inevitably “suffering” from this kind of shallow audience, which however is rarely to be encountered at the Brik. I tried to uncover the reasons why the community believes it manages to evade this perceived problem. Consistently in my participants accounts there seems to be an idea that the Brik with the state of its building, its environment and practices, provides a natural “filter” for audiences:

“So you are coming to an environment which is ambiguous and ill-defined and you can’t cope with that if you feel like you have to behave in the correct way. So you would be self-regulated out because it would be too challenging an environment” (Max)

Indeed, the Brik is visited by a high number of first-timers who never return to it. To explain this in more detail I will attempt to take a closer look at the segments that comprise its audience. First I have to make clear that in my eyes the audience of the Brik seems to be fairly homogeneous, a view that I maintained throughout my participant observation and that is most likely due to the fact that I never collected in-depth accounts from this group to be able to trace its refined differences. As such, my understanding of it is purely an etic one. Visually, apart from the fact that ages range significantly (from students in their early twenties to people in their late 60’s), similarities in the fashion sense and styling or at least in showcasing an eccentric, bohemian and/or intellectual “look”, would make crystal clear to any observer, if not who exactly is the “Brik type” then at least who is not. I was often surprised to hear from my participants that in fact there is no “Brik type” and that the audience is very wide and bears no particular characteristics. Most of them also denied that the programming is targeting particular audience profiles or that it is done having specific audiences in mind. When asked if there is a kind of audience that one would never encounter at the Brik, responses become a little more specific. Drawing on political and media consuming profiles, I was told that I would most likely never encounter “Tory

voters” or “Daily-mail readers”, but other than that anything else would go. In this case, and similarly to what Sirgy et al. (1997) describe, user-imagery stereotypes are used to provide the group with immediate and obvious ways in which to compare and convey their perceived sovereignty.

Having casually chatted to numerous audience members while working my bar shifts, I think it is safe to distinguish between those who “go to the Brik” and those who just “go to the cinema”. As is the case with any other entertainment space, a (surprisingly large) percentage of the audience will go to the Brik in order to watch a particular film or see a specific band that *happens* to be playing there. To a smaller percentage of those, the nature of the venue is irrelevant. They want to watch “Moonrise Kingdom” or “Pan’s Labyrinth” and perhaps they have missed the chance to do so at one of the other cinemas in the city. This kind of audience is the least forgiving about any dysfunctionalities that may arise on the night and the least likely to return. To others, the nature of the venue is unknown (while working there I often had to explain to customers that the Brik is entirely volunteer run and how this works), but once they realise that they are taking part in such an unconventional community they would respond with admiration and fascination. Then there are those to whom the alternative identity of the Brik is of the utmost importance, perhaps even overshadowing the appeal of the event that is on on a particular night. For them, it is the “going to the *Brik*” aspect that matters over the enjoyment of a particular band or movie, and those are the publics that will return multiple times to the venue. Most of them also know a lot of the volunteers on a first name basis, forming in theoretical terms the next “layer” after peripheral members. In describing this kind of audience one of the respondents stated:

“Usually people are OK with it because the place is quite charming, because it is a mess and it can be a little bit amateurish at times, but I don’t mean that in a bad way, I mean it in a good way. So even if things go a little bit wrong, I think the fact that they are mixing with volunteers who are enthusiastic about putting a night on, I think it gives an extra something for some people. Not everyone. Some people get upset anyway, but we do hear a lot of people speak well of the experience of attending or playing at the Brik and I think that is probably the main reason.” (Neal)

Members often describe how individuals, including volunteers themselves, identify with everyone else in the audience and feel that the audience has its own identity. This feeling of “belonging” is juxtaposed to that experienced in other venues where individuals often feel they have no connection to the larger crowd. The fact that the Brik only has one hall, which can only host one movie or one performance at a time, contributes to this feeling. Every night, the people who attend are there to see the same show, and inevitably share similar tastes, which to them means “being amongst equals”. This sense of being part of a “wider community” becomes more obvious in the smooth mingling amongst strangers that takes place in the bar area prior to the main shows, as well as the usual clapping at the end of not only live performances but also movies, or the occasional loud sharing of jokes or comments during the showcasing of a movie in the auditorium.

Interestingly enough, on occasion the worn building of the Brik, its atmosphere and occasional “malfunctions” have led first timers to form a negative impression of the community, ranging from expressing disappointment to fleeing the venue. Cold conditions, slow service or the state of the toilets are amongst the reasons that customers have expressed complaints. On a busy film night that I was selling membership cards alongside the volunteer who was selling tickets, the queue became so long that it extended to the parking space outside the Brik. The next day one of my respondents who was also there on the night commented:

“Someone said to me yesterday "why is the queue so long? Why are we waiting?" So I kind of said "oh we only got one till and... we are the Brik!" as if that was an excuse in itself. Hopefully she got in!” (Johnny)

But inevitably the nature of the Brik does not provide a good enough counter-benefit to everyone. One such memorable occasion involves two BBC employees:

“The film hadn’t started on time and nobody cared that these two women were arguing, like they were shouting... and they preceded very viciously to express their opinion and then our opinion was quite viciously expressed back. Then they left, they actually came out of the

film, they said “you are shambolic, this is disgusting ...I am from the BBC...” there was a bit of laugh to that actually, and then somebody said that “We don’t care if you are from the BBC that doesn’t mean anything to us, we are volunteer run and we do what we want, it doesn’t mean that we run smoothly” and she was very, very disgusted that we weren’t valuing her opinion, cause it wasn’t valued at all and it was laughed at. We didn’t respond well at all to the criticism, we didn’t try to say sorry - nobody apologized about the way that the Brik runs. We were just glad that she was gone.” (Lisa)

In Lisa’s story, one can observe the complementary relations of inclusion and exclusion based on (dis)taste, as identified by Wilk (1997):

Figure 3: Relations of Inclusion and Exclusion based on (dis)taste

	Inclusion	Exclusion
Taste	“We like things run in a laid back manner.”	“They like the overtly organised approach and mundane offering of organisations like the BBC.”
Distaste	“We hate the bureaucratic and unchallenging ways of organisations like the BBC.”	“They think we are shambolic, they cannot stand it.”

Adapted from Wilk (1997)

From this standpoint, the audience, which exchanges its economic capital for cultural by attending the venue, is used by community members as “evidence” of their sovereignty. Moreover, it is not only the community’s publics that are used in this inclusion/exclusion process (Brik punters that “get it” and those that don’t), but despite their ignorance, punters of other venues that may have never even heard about the Brik

community, are used in the ingroup's narratives to proclaim distinction. The "us and them" battle, becomes more sophisticated as taste wars are not only expressed through objects of preference or the appropriation of practice, but are opening up to include a wider reservoir of resources.

8. Inter-Group Dynamics of Taste: Resignification

This chapter examines the manner in which “us and them” tensions are actualised in more subtle ways when compared to those presented in the previous chapter, involving skilful meaning subversions that resignify practices and their attached tastes. Resignification refers to the insertion of new sign elements (previously exo-cultural), which are lifted from their original contexts and inserted in other sequences, not necessarily in the position that they occupied in their prior incarnation (Barthes 1957). The process is not uncommon amongst avant-garde movements, which are known to employ a number of techniques to make a point including “unusual fashions, the blurring of boundaries between art and everyday life, juxtapositions of seemingly disparate objects and behaviours, intentional provocation of audience, reorganisation of accepted performative styles and procedures” (Henry 1984, 322). In the case of the Brik, the findings demonstrate that resignification takes place through three distinct processes: recontextualising exo-cultural elements, appropriating practice through conspicuous absence and recontextualising prevailing aesthetics. The significance of resignification is to be traced in the community’s challenge towards the orthodoxy of the set-up of other art spaces and its ability to exclude those not possessing the “right” cultural capital. At the same time, it praises the ability of insiders, including members and the community’s publics, to “decode” the process and its underlying meanings.

8.1 Recontextualising Exo-Cultural Items

Taking a closer look at the Brik’s programme, the casual observer will notice with surprise the inclusion of films that at first glance seem like an alien choice for the community, seemingly being classified as “mainstream”. The astonishment from this observation is further enforced by the fact that on most occasions, the same films are likely to be on at the independent multiplex, Sandbox, or even worse at one of the chain multiplexes. The practice of showcasing such films displays some common characteristics each time. First, the group is “forced” to have the film on for at least three or four consecutive nights, which is due to distributor-imposed terms, who want to

make sure that the film generates enough profit to be worth lending it to this particular cinema. This constitutes a compromise for members, not only because putting on the same offering for few nights in a row is a practice that bears too close a resemblance to “them”, but because it also restricts the eclectic image of the venue, which is partly made up from having a different offering every day. The second characteristic is that such films usually turn out to be sold-out nights for the Brik, resulting in long queues of customers (and on occasion the turning away of some of them) and naturally a very high turnover. In fact, these kind of events constitute “cash cows” for the community and there is a shared understanding amongst members that while not necessarily complying with the joint enterprise of experimentation or the common goal of “opening up people’s minds”, they are making up for the financial loss of other events (some of which are inarguably poorly attended) that are chosen for their intellectual rigour and the stimulation they provide.

As one might predict, the selection of more mainstream films is not done on a random basis where “everything goes”, for inclusion of such films needs to have a rationale, however abstract, as to why it is acceptable for these commodities to be present in this context. For example, the decision to put on the popular movie “Pan’s Labyrinth” a few years back was justified on the basis of it being a foreign (non-Hollywood) production and being a “Brik kind of film” due to its “arty, weird and quirky character”. The film was on twice a day for a week, with the audience queuing outside on each occasion, thus generating an enormous profit for a cinema of the Brik’s range. However, justifying the choice of blockbuster movies that have clear cut associations with the practices of outgroups (e.g. showcasing of Hollywood movies) requires more than just an abstract connection of the content of the film to the Brik’s identity. In such cases, members are complying with the argument that “practice is defined by its intention” (Barthes 1970) and the rationale for inclusion focuses on the goals served by the showcasing of the film. Max explains:

“You can show something that is incredibly commercial but there needs to be a good reason that backs it up. And that reason maybe a sort of take on it that transforms what it is into something else. So it essentially isn’t the thing that it was. And for me... King’s Speech has never been showed at the Brik. Well I didn’t even know they have been showing

that - that seems inappropriate to me unless there is a swing on it or a reason. It is something that you can see elsewhere, a big commercial film that is available elsewhere and if you are just showing it as a film, that is a waste and damaging I would say. Unless you adapt it in some way.” (Max)

Max expresses his frustration with the choice to put on a popular film with a royalty-friendly theme that was widely available in cinemas throughout the country and highlights his ignorance that the film would be put on. His opposition is here justified by the idea that the audience can go pretty much anywhere to watch this kind of movie, a reason widely stated to me by members in their attempts to justify why particular movies would be a “no-go” for the group and in line with the goal of “making a difference”. However, there seem to be more reasons behind such disapprovals, as on multiple occasions the Brik *does* show films that are available elsewhere, if the ideological underpinnings of the film are at least partly in line with the community’s common purpose. This is proven in the recent showing of “Sightseers”, a quirky British black comedy that was also on at the Sandbox for consecutive nights. Despite this, there was consensus amongst members that this was a suitable match. From this standpoint, programming choices are not simply a matter of showcasing what is not available elsewhere but a matter of fitting, at least in part, with the normative system followed.

What is of interest in Max’s account is that commercial films are not an instant turn down for the group, but can be incorporated in programming if they are given “an angle” that essentially transforms the meaning of the movie. A recurring event of this sort is the monthly comedy combo night. Born out of some volunteers’ passion for repertory cinema and classic Hollywood movies from the industry’s golden era, the “Hollywood” label was still a negative association for the Brik. Despite the fact that these sorts of films are renowned for their romantic feeling and nostalgia they generate about an era that has passed (and perhaps that could be enough of a justification for inclusion in programming, given the community’s associations with romanticism as discussed in the previous chapter), the genre was opposed for lacking experimentation and criticality. More specifically, some members suggested that repertory cinema was “available elsewhere”, predictable and boring and not in line with what the space offers. Eventually, and with the insistence of those in favour of this form of cinema, the

showcasing of the genre was combined with an open invitation for standup comedians to create the comedy combo events: one hour of open mic and a classic comedy film. The altering of the event from a “repertory cinema night” to a “comedy event” and the incorporation of the film in a night dedicated to performance, gained the acceptance of the community by changing the essence of what it would represent, i.e. not a predictable “oldie” but something to be generated and participated in, as well as consumed. Similarly, contemporary mainstream movies are on occasion showcased as part of an event. In contrast to independent productions that are significant enough to be presented as movie-only nights, mainstream films are never a sole offering for the evening, but part of a wider theme that alters the angle from which the movie is looked at. In the words of Jack:

“We have shown Batman, not the one now but the previous together with a comic book event. And it is by Nolan who is a really good director and things like these. It is a piece of cinema not a piece of popcorn toss.” (Jack)

The social reproduction of such films, the lifting of mainstream movies from their original context, a commercial multiplex, and insertion into an avant-garde space as a supporting artefact to a main event, redefines the film in itself. The adoption of the external practice here is not an isolated cultural reproduction, for when jointed with space and the goal of the event (e.g. to produce comedy, to educate about comic book culture) the film serves as a comment on the nature of its previous context in relation to its new (Holden 2001). That is, if Batman is treated as a piece of “popcorn toss” in the multiplex, it is respected as a form of art in the Brik. In this case, it is not the intrinsic properties of the film that are rejected, but the way it is embraced by dissociative others and by changing the metaphysical context in which the movie is displayed, the film acquires a new meaning, one that is considered worthy enough for inclusion in the community’s programme. From this standpoint, “them” is unable to provide the coordinates for what should be avoided (as Simmel 1955; Hogg 1998; Hogg, Banister and Stephenson 2009 suggest), but the *manner* in which the item is embraced by dissociative others underlies ingroup negotiations as to whether the exo-cultural taste can be successfully appropriated and exhibited by the ingroup, on the condition that it is given a “worthy” intent.

I have so far demonstrated that mainstream movies within the new context that is created for them by members, form part of a second order semiological system, because they are constructed from a semiological chain that existed before, that of associating them with commercial theatres, and an audience in need of escapism. However, there is an additional second order semiological system that takes place in parallel and which is brought to the fore in Alex's account:

"I kind of like that. I like that fact that that (showing mainstream movies) happens here *precisely* because it is something that kind of goes against the grain of what the Brik is and in that aspect, I think it is quite radical even though some people would criticize it for the fact that it is not radical. But in the context of programming in the Brik that can be completely radical because it is just challenging the idea of what the Brik is and what should be programmed" (Alex)

By placing the exo-cultural element (in this case the blockbuster) in the new context (of an avant-garde cinema), not only does the movie acquire a new metaphysical meaning but the context in itself is affected by the insertion of the alien form and hence transformed during the process. From this standpoint, the risk of trying to recontextualise successfully a taste complies with the community's enterprise of experimentation and alters in the process the nature of the community itself.

However, not all "physical" forms can be successfully recontextualised. That is, some tastes have connotations that are so badly contaminated that no form of resignification allows for the group to embrace them. In an unsolicited account one of the members states:

"We wouldn't show Transformers because the people that come here wouldn't watch it and the people who watch Transformers wouldn't come here"

Mainstream movies showcased in the Brik are usually justifiable not only in terms of the much necessary income that they generate or the resignification that they have

undergone, but also on grounds of critical acclaim of one sort or another. Pan's Labyrinth is a foreign production with the right atmosphere and Batman is a classic with an acclaimed director. Moreover, Moonrise Kingdom may feature Bruce Willis but the director is renowned for his cinematography and the film has a Brik-like quirkiness. As such, mainstream films resemble contaminated patients. Some of them can be "saved", appropriated, given a new life in the form of a meaningful commodity that complements an important event. Others, however, are beyond "treatment", whereby their incorporation in the programme would be threatening to the group's status and would jeopardise the superiority of other exhibited tastes.

8.2 Appropriating Practice through Conspicuous Absence

Rather than moving signs away from their original contexts and inserting them in new sequences, on some occasions the distinct absence of a sign that one would normally be expecting to encounter in the context of a cinema is sufficient to drive the resignification process and drawing of boundaries from "them". This is mirrored in the absence of multiple items that movie-goers are used to have at their disposal while enjoying the cinema experience and which I have addressed in the previous chapter: from the absence of signs as to where the Brik is located or where one can buy tickets once inside the venue, to the exemption of Coca Cola from the bar offerings and the missing of big, comfortable seating that one would normally find at other venues. Members attempt to create a cultural space (in this case physical) from which overwhelming, excessive consumerism has been filtered out (Rumbo 2002), not only in straightforward ways (for example, by not allowing the showcase of adverts before film screenings), but also by excluding objects and ways of working that carry subtle connections to the practices of "them". For the purposes of explaining just why these distinct absences are conspicuous, not only because they de-fetishise the experience, but also because of the manner in which they induce symbolic value to other items that *are* available in the space, I will focus on the example of popcorn.

"We don't have popcorn. That came up again recently. I remember thinking that was weird. Because it's a cinema, a cinema should have popcorn. But then you have it because the biggest cinemas define that as

what cinemas do. And by not doing it you are kind of redefining what that space offers people”. (Billy)

By removing the sign, the group attempts to restate what the space’s purpose is. For the absence of such signs to become conspicuous, however, the practice or artefact that is removed needs to be one that has powerful associations with its original context. Only in this case does the nonappearance become noticeable and meaningful. In the popcorn example, the focus of the rejection is not the physical commodity in itself – the existence of a popcorn machine would not in any obvious way trivialise the identity of the venue - but in a metaphysical sense, popcorn has established its status as a necessary companion to the consumption of mainstream movies of low intellectual rigour. The practice that is rejected is that of gobbling handfuls of overpriced, oversized bags of popcorn while passively engaging in movies that serve escapist purposes. Discussions over the suggestion of getting a popcorn machine in the mailing list reveal the thoughts of volunteers on the matter.

One member’s ironic response reads:

“I fully support this proposal, providing that popcorn purchasers are required to stay behind and clear up the mess, and that those of us who can’t abide the smell are provided with surgical breathing masks. Oh yes and we’d also need a special noise filter built into the sound system to drown out that infernal crunching while the audience is watching, say, Tarkovsky’s *Stalker*”

While another members jokes that “Popcorn and a Bergman would not go together well”. The inconsistency between the seemingly innocent grain and watching the artistic productions of renowned film makers, whose works are famous for the complexity of their underlying themes - religious doubt, sexual frustration, obsession amongst the many - is of course not related to any intrinsic properties of the snack. Popcorn’s function, in this case, is representing the numbness and mindlessness of the audience of “them”, their lack of cultural capital and the inevitable consequences of this: inaccessibility to the subtlety of complex works, a constant seeking for escapism and last but not least an inability to show the appropriate respect towards films that require the full intellectual engagement of their viewer. Moreover, by rejecting the physically

innocent grain, the unwanted connotations of its metaphysical form are also avoided, reinstating the space as a cinema for thinkers and intellectuals.

By joining the signification of the absence of popcorn with other practices of a similar ilk observed in the space (i.e. the distressed walls, the programming etc) the ontology from which the distinctly absent sign originates comes into focus (Holden 2001). But what does this absence signify to its observers about the society from which it originates? Without having to openly express contemptuousness against the mainstream cinemas and their audiences, the community trivialises the values that are at the heart of dissociative others. From this standpoint, the conspicuous absence of popcorn, Coca-Cola, blockbusters or big lights, is appropriated because it represents an indirect critique towards the culture of “them”.

8.3 Resignifying Prevailing Aesthetics

The idea that art should have a shock effect is an established part of avant-garde aesthetics (Laing 1985). Redefining what counts as an aesthetic category in order to provoke outsiders and exclude those not possessing the necessary knowledge to “decode” the subversion, has been a tactic used by artists of many movements in the past. During the ethnography I often observed volunteers resignifying the prevailing aesthetic of commodities and other artefacts of a primarily utilitarian nature, by treating them like objects of art and as part of the artistic productions that members engage in and offer to their publics. Of these, two prominent mundane categories whose prevalent aesthetic is altered, are the bar practices and the information systems that are in place.

Within the bar area a practice with clear anti-commercialist connotations is the distinct absence of the “original” Coca-Cola and its replacement by a cola drink named “Brik Cola”. As a new volunteer I was trained on how to produce Brik Cola, by mixing a measurement of a homemade cola syrup with common carbonated water. The concentrated syrup is produced following an openly sourced recipe and is always stocked in the fridge, ready to be mixed with the soda for a brand new bottle of Brik Cola. The drink is served to audience members for £1. It is inarguably far from a perfect replicate of the original (overtly sweet and with less powerful carbon dioxide gas),

however, while working in the bar I observed that not only Brik Cola was popular, but also that the majority of customers asked for it using its full name: “can I have a Brik Cola please?” On fewer occasions customers may request a “coke” (expecting a Coca-Cola) in which case members have to explain that the group does not serve the original, but produces instead a homemade cola drink. Most of the times this generates a response of admiration and customers ask for more information as to how it is produced or when did the community start experimenting with it. The drink is clearly popular amongst the audience:

“It has become one of the things that the Brik is proud of. To me that has been a perfect Brik project. It has been in the media, it is like something the Brik is known for. People understand that it is homemade, anyone who understands the open source, probably not so many people, but people who get the open source connection, not the idea that it is open source. I don’t work at the bar anymore but I love the idea that it has got its own life and I guess the volunteers like it and then they talk to customers about it and people like coming to the Brik and knowing that it has got its own special stuff.

Interviewer: What was the motivation behind Brik Cola?

It was to extend the programme into the bar, I see the bar just as much as part of the programme as what goes on on stage.” (Frances)

“Us and them” tension in this case, relates to the subversion of the mundane to the sacred. But what is of interest in this instance is not the idea that even mundane product categories (refreshments in this case) can be used to draw distinctions (after all think of the Coca-Cola and Pepsi wars (Muniz and O’Hamer 2001) and even the marketing of Dr. Pepper as a “unique” drink with a cult status), nor the meanings drawn from the open source origin of the drink - which is inherently appropriative- and its anti-capitalist connotations. It is instead the conception of the refreshment as being part of the programme and the artistic offerings of the space. That is, the respondent in the passage above sees Brik Cola as yet another performance taking place in the venue: an artistic project in itself.

In a similar case, Cova and White (2010) describe how consumers rejecting the Warhammer brand reside in producing their own DIY, cheaper alternatives, eventually creating a counter-brand. As is the case with Brik Cola, the people that buy the counter-brand are not preoccupied with the quality or taste of the product in relation to the original. On the contrary, consuming the counter-brand contributes to the symbolic demarcation of the community (and in extension its publics) from dissociative others, by implying a common understanding as to why the original brand is rejected. As Thompson et al. (2006) would argue, Brik Cola is a doppelgänger brand that mocks not only an exploitative company abusing its economic power, but also the actors/distributors of the product and its consumers. The identity value of avoiding the original brand and exhibiting a preference for the alternative is underlined by an artisan/owner motif (Thompson et al. 2006) that subtly criticises the original brand as “distasteful” and inappropriate.

Brik Cola is not the only commodity that members treat as an artistic project. The IT technology that facilitates the community’s operations, and primarily the in-house server that supports it, are perceived to be in the words of one of the volunteers “the beating heart of the community”. Unlike most organisations that choose to outsource their server management and web hosting, the Brik has chosen to keep its IT operations in-house.

The choice of most organisations to use external servers is not an unjustified one as outsourcing is praised for being less costly and more reliable. In fact, keeping the server in-house has caused multiple technical problems to the group owing to the server’s low power and frequent disruptions in connection. In practical terms, this means that the Brik email and website can be unavailable at times, affecting both the operations of the group and the convenience for members of the public. It also means that the community is unable to host any heavy duty media because the links are not good enough. In the words of one of the members:

“Sometimes it is like we are cutting our own nose to spite our face, but there is this idea that by not having the server in the building we are somehow jettisoning a kind of core Brik principle”. (Johnny)

Eventually the old server was to be replaced by a new one and members had a visionary impulse to place the new acquisition in public view. The rationale behind this decision was that the server is public infrastructure (usage is free). Discussions relating to how the showcase of the new server would take place were not very different to those of planning an artistic event. One of the members of the IT team, writing in the mailing list to finalise the location where the server would be placed, states:

“We could have a monitor permanently displaying the access log which would make it the coolest toilet block in town, possibly the UK. I like the idea of it being like a cabinet of curiosity type artefact”.

In the same manner as a cabinet of curiosity objects had undefinable categorical boundaries, the server serves a functional, a symbolic and an aesthetic purpose by providing a service to the community, carrying an underlying political message against propriety systems and being exhibited as a work of art.

Negating mainstream negation of what counts as aesthetic and what counts as mundane has been a common strategy to draw distinctions primarily amongst artists and intellectuals (Dada and Kitsch being amongst the two examples of movements incorporating mundane objects in works of art and mass producing art using cultural icons, respectively). Following Bourdieu (1984,) the easiest way for countercultures to “shock” is through symbolic transgressions, in other words by managing to give aesthetic status to objects (or ways of representing them) “that are excluded by the dominant aesthetic of the time”. From this standpoint, a symbolic transgression (considering a refreshment in the case of Brik Cola, and a server to be projects of art) constitutes a challenge to the empty values of outsiders. In simpler terms, the group can transform (or recuperate) and purify mundane objects that have a different appeal to anyone outside the community.

What is of interest in these symbolic transgressions, is that the practices of the group are not driven by instrumental attempts to improve the IT technology that supports the group (given the drawbacks that arise from keeping a server in-house), nor by seeking for a good tasting cola. Volunteers (and while this was not investigated as part of this project, to a great extent, audience members) derive pleasure in the awareness that those unable to understand the reasons behind the rejection of the original drink and its replacement by a home-made one or the rejection of an outsourced server that would make daily practices easier and more manageable, are left discomforted and ultimately excluded. Such transgressions are only valued by their creators when they successfully provoke those for whom they feel disgust.

8.4 The Significance of Resignification

An ultimate linking goal behind the different types of appropriation encountered in the Brik, is the attempt by the group to appropriate and ultimately transform the field of the arts and the purposes that it serves. In one account, Frances compares the Brik's looser interface to that of other spaces. She criticises the "being treated like a customer" feeling that she and other Brik customers get when they attend other venues and explains how the prosuming nature of the community empowers the group to generate within itself a type of entertainment that the industry is unable to offer.

"The Brik platform is to be a model of how leisure doesn't need to be a category and entertainment can be something that you generate and participate in, as well as consuming" (Frances)

France's praise for the prosumption opportunities generated in the community relate to critiques with regards to the alienation of individuals from the production of entertainment. Eco (1975), in particular, argues that the consumption of a pop music concert is a display of both physical and soul energy, but there is an inherent contradiction in the artists provoking the audience which, however is expected, solely to observe passively while the artists consume their energy on stage. Eco perceives this as an unfair and unequal form of division of labour which alienates the audience by forcing

it into a largely passive role. In a presumption context, however, individuals are able to direct their energy via the production of the offering as well as its consumption.

Even more importantly than the resignification process itself, is what it communicates about the audience and its intellectual capability (Holden 2001). Placement of alien artefacts in a new context and even alteration of the context's meaning because of the insertion of exo-cultural elements, underscores a presumption about the group and audience's competence to decode the process. If the latter is unable to grasp the mockery and trivialisation of dissociative others' values that is in the heart of the appropriation process there is a danger that the adoption of external tastes will have an opposite effect: putting off audiences or worse, diluting the Brik's identity by bringing the commercial element into the picture. The ability of individuals to "see through", to trace the obviousness of the motivation behind the absence of popcorn, the offering of Brik-Cola and the showcasing of Batman, simultaneously "praises" the ability of the decoders to understand what the space is all about, thus turning them into a "worthy" public for the Brik (that stands in direct opposition to the "mindless" audience of dissociative others as discussed earlier) and excludes those unable to decode. In this process of exclusion, however, the tastes of dissociative others do not necessarily constitute distaste for the ingroup and its publics, but rather, can, on condition, be embraced by members. The latter perspective questions the bipolar relationship between the constructs as suggested by social identity theory and provides evidence that the relationship between "us" and "them" paints a far more complicated picture than that of mutual rejection.

9. Intra-Community Dynamics: Negotiating Heterogeneous Tastes

9.1 Doxa and Struggle in the Collective

As I have mentioned on multiple occasions before, my initial purpose when I approached the Brik community was to research how members negotiate collective tastes in an “us versus them” fashion. My etic perception of the group was one of a concrete, homogenous unit that stands in opposition to the mainstream offering of commercial art venues and the overtly organised, structure-bound practices of dissimilar others. As established in the previous chapters, the Brik community, indeed, defines itself by marking its differences to “them”, players located in diverse, semi-autonomous and specialised spheres of action, including the field of the arts, the workers cooperative movement and in some cases even economic systems that dominate the whole of society. In demonstrating these externally (intra-group) driven dynamics of taste-making, however, I have purposefully omitted any account indicating the clashing of views *amongst* members of the group. The picture of the community that I have painted is a rather rosy one, where solidarity, experimentation and ultimately provocation against the dominant model of entertainment come to the forefront. In fact, even though I witnessed differences of opinions – mostly to do with programming choices - amongst members since the start of my participant observation, it was not until a couple of months after I started my volunteer role that I noticed that this divergence of opinions had deep ideological roots and often developed into intense debates that lasted for months, years in some cases. The primary forum in which these debates are expressed is the mailing lists. Within the exchanged dialogues negotiating “what is appropriate” and what “our ethos does/does not allow us to do” make their appearance all too often, indicating that the discussions concern what is “fitting” amongst this community of practitioners. Such debates may be of a wide breadth, involving a wide range of core and marginal members (Wenger et al. 2002), while on other occasions they may be centring on two or three individuals.

At this point I should mention that neither the fact that the community is heterogeneous nor the existence of tensions amongst members should come as a

surprise. First, even though as I have pointed out in Chapter 5, studies on consumption collectives have in their majority set aside intra-group tensions in favour of studying other phenomena, literature on communities of practice widely recognises the heterogeneous nature of its object of study (Wenger et al. 2002; Handley et al. 2006; Swan et al. 2002). Second, not unlike other cultures, and despite the community's formally flat structure, the Brik constitutes a space of domination, where informal hierarchies are created and maintained. The group's culture, the symbolic systems in place that determine the group's "alternative" identity, understanding of their reality and ensuring communication and interaction, necessarily embody power relations amongst the core, marginal and peripheral members (Navarro 2006). Metaphorically speaking, this symbolic system entails a set of "rules of the game" that are shared as a common understanding amongst members and constitute the community's doxa ([1977] 2002) in Bourdieusian terms. From this standpoint, it is the group's doxa that prevents members from putting certain kinds of blockbusters on the programming discussion table, to promote the Brik in mainstream publications or to raise the prices of tickets in order to make more profit. This collective conscious (used here as specific to the community rather than in Durkheimian terms to the entire society) defines what is allowed and what is not: certain cultural artefacts are recognized by doxa as being inappropriate to a particular social position, hence it helps to maintain symbolic boundaries, the "sense of the community's place", and members' sense of belonging, which is closely connected to all the examples presented in the previous chapters that the group considers to "not to be for us".

In the case of the Brik, not all members agree on the doxa or rules of the game, which results in "members occupying positions aimed at either conserving or transforming the structure of relations or forces in the group" (paraphrased from Bourdieu 1995, 39). Those taking the position aimed at transforming the power relations, try to transform the rules of the game to fit their own views and tastes, whilst those attempting to maintain the status quo do not agree with this and hence a clash ensues. In this struggle players make use of their power, constituted of social and cultural capital as well as length of volunteering and intensity of participation, to impose the tastes that appeal to them the most. In this chapter I first demonstrate the nature of the struggle in the Brik community. I subsequently trace the sources of heterogeneity of members and explore the expression of such discrepancies in the form of practice debates that involve

“sayings” as much as “doings”. Finally, I unfold the strategies employed by members with different power positions in their attempt to challenge and alter collective taste. In the process, a number of questions arise with regards to the explanatory power of the core/marginal/peripheral classification of members as proposed by Wenger et al. (2002).

9.2. Tracing the Sources of Heterogeneity

9.2.1 Evolution of the Collective

During my time at the Brik I became aware that the community started out as a much smaller group, made up entirely of artists and operating with far less structure than it does today. Reflecting on the sources of its heterogeneous nature prompted me to look into how different it was back in its conception days: its growth from a group of four artists to a community of over 250 volunteers, its development from a partnership with an illegal bar to a registered workers cooperative, the evolution of its offering from limited tech-scene acts to a wide range of events that may even include the occasional blockbuster movie, and most importantly the historicity of the evolving joint enterprises. The reasons why it is important to flashback to those early years, is that the genesis of the community coincides with the formation of its doxa, the formal and, perhaps even more importantly informal, rules that got established by volunteers through trial and error, routine and repetition, refinement of practice and ultimately learning. It is also necessary in order to understand the different perceptions of the joint enterprise by longstanding members, those who have been around to experience the early days of the Brik, and newer participants, who, having joined at a later (or much later) time, have had to familiarise themselves with the existing informal rules, conforming with some and challenging others, thus resulting in increasing heterodoxy within the group.

One of the participants reminisces:

“The previous project was a thing called Club Triangle, and that was an event that was held in a different area of the city, in a big warehouse space (...) it wasn’t licensed, it did not have permission, so it was an

illegal event basically, an illegal bar, much DIY and a big space where we just showed films and invite people. We went to the cash and curry and grabbed some beer, sold it, we made no profit or anything, we sold it cost price. We sold people tickets to get in, two or three quid and that was just to pay for the hire of the films. All the films were always 16mm and they were all...came out of catalogues or collections in London, London filmmakers, co-op collections, and BFI avant-garde sort of films. (...)

When the arts centre (the business operating in the building that hosts the Brik now) shut down we thought whether we could take on a cinema as a business, as a project, and use it to kind of fund, back our own ideas, our production ideas. That is how it came about. So we looked into it. Basically it was a real thing...the rent is this much, we need this equipment... starting a cinema... cinemas were closing down, it was difficult to get help. All the experience we had in cinema groups involved these tiny operations in squats and things like that. But this was a proper cinema! We gotta get a projector, a sound system, a programme... how are we going to book films? We got that book and start with A, then B, then C. We had to fax 20th Century Fox to say "hey we got over this cinema"! It helped that it was a cinema before cause we were taking over this site and run it and call it the Brik. That was its genesis. And we knew because of Club Triangle, we had a hunch that we could make it work. We thought there were enough people in the city, enough alternative, interesting people. And it is 100 seats. Is there 100 people who might be interested? And thought probably just about, if we do a good event, 100 people may come.(...)

It was 4 of us who started it. A cinema is a much easier thing to run than the thing that the Brik is now. A cinema if you just show films, you don't need that many people, you need one to project, they can also usher, one person to sell tickets... So you need two people. Maybe one person to run the bar. There was no bar at the beginning. There was only an illegal bar where the office is now. People who did films, watched

films they would all leave. Me and J would run down after the film and everyone had gone, we got a bar but no one was staying and we wanted to socialise. So we had to be careful with the illegal bar and quietly say to people “psst if you want to stay we got a bar”. And then we got a licence. But we quickly had an energy about it, because we knew other people doing similar stuff, like two writers/curators who were based in Bristol then who run a magazine were doing similar kinds of events, much more alternative, left wing events and they had done events at the Sandbox and stuff, so they liked what we were doing and they kind of got involved. It was four of us but plenty of people who wanted to get involved, usher, paint, everyone who was around really... So it was more like five to six people in the very early months.” (Daniel)

The image of the newly born Brik stands in sharp contrast to what I experienced as a volunteer. First, there is the matter of the size of the group. From a club of four co-founders and their friends to a community of 250, the scope of both ideologies present and operations taking place is crucial in explaining heterodoxy in the collective. The “group of five to six people” described in Daniel’s account refers to not only a group of artists with a common vision, but also to a tight knit group of friends, a gang, who in the words of another volunteer were “constantly in each other’s lives”, knew each other very well and spent time in the building all together during the same hours of the day. Currently, the pool of volunteers of the Brik is so large that inevitably there are members, particularly from the peripheral space, who passing each other on the street would remain ignorant of the fact that they belong to the same group. Commenting on the matter, in her account, Frances, who is also a longstanding member but joined a few years after the conception of the Brik, describes the early group as an exclusive “boys club”:

“It was a lot smaller; there was a lot less structure, the roles tended to fill up on the day. There was a rota - but no one liked putting their name down. So it was all the same group of about 15 - 20 people scrambled on the night. It was a lot, lot more like trying to break into a small social group than it is now because everyone was there, there weren’t so many casual people, and everyone had assigned roles. So if you were new,

you really felt new because it was only about 20 people around. My understanding of it was much more of a boy's club. There was a whole era between 1998 and 2001, and I think that was a huge separate section of time, when it was much more of a boys club run by this group of the co-founders and then their mates and that structure was starting to break down later on. So over the time the structure has been democratized in various stages.” (Frances)

Similarities in the artistic background of the “club” members and a commonly shared vision with regards to the Brik's possibilities, made the early group a much harder unit to penetrate and firmly excluding to individuals of a different background, particularly anyone outside of the sphere of the arts. Part of the democratization that Frances describes in her account has occurred in the form of the slow but steady growth of the community, with its increasing popularity eventually attracting individuals of a very diverse background, people who did not encompass identical views, preferences, tastes or ideals with those that were to the forefront of the Brik during its early days. This wider community of volunteers along with the repetition and inevitable establishment of some practices, which became essential for the management of this much larger group, changed the face of the community, including its: offering, structure, operations and ultimately identity.

“During the first phase of the Brik, the first 18 months to be precise, there was almost no conflict at all between people in terms of personal clashes of ideology or clashes of personality or whatever. Your “key” is quite a big key in a smaller group, you have got to understand more, like where your position is. Whereas in a bigger group your key becomes smaller and smaller. Till all it takes is to say “I like the Brik and I am going to volunteer”, which does not mean anything. And then you can participate. If someone came to the smaller group and said “I like the Brik” it would be like...

“What else? What else have you got?”

“I like films”.

“OK, what films? What skills have you got?”

You know what I mean? So you need a quite big profile in a way. And that defines the level you can participate. The later phase is about openness. If something is open then the connections between people are no longer important, you lose your social connection. (...) What has happened is that it has gone from a few people doing a lot, to lot of people doing a little. Though you still have people who have taken on a lot of responsibility and end up doing a lot.” (Daniel)

In his account, Daniel highlights that one of the main differences of the Brik’s first phase to the later years is the degree of affinity of preferences and skills that newcomers have needed to exhibit in order to join in. From this standpoint, a smaller group of relatively homogenous members with established positions and extended responsibilities constitutes in itself a powerful “filtering mechanism” with regards to the profile of potential new participants. This filtering mechanism is to be traced in the fact that this smaller group, mostly known via word of mouth and social capital, is likely to attract a rather narrow audience originating from an akin ideological space. In addition to this, the homodoxy of the “boys club” puts off anyone who does not share similar dispositions or is unable to understand the underlying ethos. In contrast, in the latter years, the natural growth of the community (perhaps complemented by the co-opted popularity of “alternative” spaces) has attracted a wider range of publics which became interested in participation. Increasing diversity within the group significantly weakened the natural filtering mechanism for two reasons. First, heterodoxy softened the informal criteria that were in place for participant recruitment, in the sense that ideological affinity ceased being a subtle requirement. Second, extensive division of labour in this context means that members do not need to possess any particular skills or knowledge and can choose to carry minimum responsibility (what is referred to as a “small key” in Daniel’s account), which means that the decision of an individual to join can be made light heartedly and without much consideration, making the participant’s role a lot more disposable compared with the early days.

9.2.2 Participants' Reasons for Volunteering

Similarly to Chalmers et al. (2013), the data reveals that heterogeneity amongst members is partly due to differences in the stated reasons why members decided to join the community in the first place and, following this, their different orientation towards its object of practice. Longstanding members' accounts reveal their artistic visions and their perception of the Brik as a platform that could assist the actualisation of those visions. Such accounts also demonstrate an interest in the production (over the consumption) of art and an appreciation of the group's ability to operate autonomously and collectively. Commonly, the vast majority of the older members found themselves in the Brik via word of mouth and social capital and through friends who were existing participants.

"I was interested in ideas of dissolving authorship of things and sayings. Doing things together and the cinema taking all the authorship. Not being protective over ideas. And if you work that way you can create good things." (Daniel)

"Well I was around at the beginning, not involved as a volunteer at the very beginning, but the people who set it up used to run another cinema club and I was in another art group and we sort of knew about each other. And then I started getting involved by performing. We did a set of re-schools of *Frankenstein* of 1931 which doesn't have any music, it is just dialogue and they had three nights with different musical acts rescoring. More than anything I DJ really." (Max)

In contrast to this, the accounts of newer members reveal less artistically envisioned or ideologically charged explanations for their decision to volunteer. Those participants all state in common their passion for film or other forms of art, focusing, however, on the pleasures of consuming rather than producing. In their minds, love for art is a pre-requisite for joining the group and a necessary criterion that rationalises the choice to volunteer. However, in comparison to the accounts of those present in the early days, newer members' stories place less focus on the ethos of the Brik and more on personal benefits that can be extracted from participation. From this standpoint, their

participation and self-authentication is, in comparison to longstanding members, more individual oriented than communal (Arnould and Price 2000).

Individual benefits include:

Pleasure:

“I don’t go to the Brik to make huge artistic statements. I just go to have some fun you know.” (Jack)

“I had done some volunteer work, I do that sorts of stuff but... It would be something that I would do because I felt that it was helping people, like working in a care home, but it wasn’t something that was particularly fun. You know it is not a very fun thing to do it, so I was looking for something that was a bit more fun. I do really like the arts, I have always been into music, film particularly, so when I found out they volunteer at the Brik it just seemed to fit perfectly really.” (Neal)

Socialising:

“It was just chance that I got here because I emailed quite a few other organisations saying that I would be happy to volunteer and the Brik was the first place that got back to me, so I decided just to stick with the Brik instead of waiting for another organisation (...) I just view it as socialising.” (Robbie)

Work experience in the arts and escapism from one’s main job:

“I did really want to get a job in something film related or music related. It just did not really happen. So I quickly learnt that spending the time somewhere like the Brik is quite a good way to fill that gap if you have to do a job that is not really that interesting.” (Billy)

The diversity of the reasons why people choose to participate in the group and the shift from politically or artistically charged motivations to more hedonistic/individual oriented incentives does not go unnoticed by longstanding members and is best summarised in the account below:

“I guess it (the community) has gotten less political in the last five or six years. More people are coming in just to enjoy films or something rather than...of course they kind of get on board with the Brik ideals. But it is becoming difficult because those ideas of what it originally was started to wear off and come back again depending on who is volunteering at the time. And so you have got people who are quite rigid and they see what the Brik’s ethos is and think it has got to go *that* way and then there are people that are a little less interested in that, they are mostly interested in getting their event on and so it is kind of difficult.” (Mark)

Max refers to the community’s doxa by recognising that all members to one extent or another comply with the Brik’s ideals, a matter which I will discuss in more length later on. Most importantly, however, he recognises a division between those attempting to protect what is thought to be the communal ethos and those attending to more personal satisfaction. Taking a closer look at my respondents life histories, this division is not random but seems to have its roots, at least in part, in the participants’ backgrounds and especially those who identify themselves first and foremost as “artists”, whose main income is generated from an arts related job, and those whose main occupation is outside this sphere. The first group, within which the majority of individuals tend to have a longstanding relationship with the Brik, has a far more politically charged view of what the community’s purpose is, while the latter, tends to focus on the leisure and social aspects of being part of the collective.

9.2.3 Evolution of Doxa

Having presented an account of the community’s evolution from a homogenous group of a few to a diverse community of many, I now demonstrate the current state of the doxa, which not only keeps the group together, but most importantly contributes to the

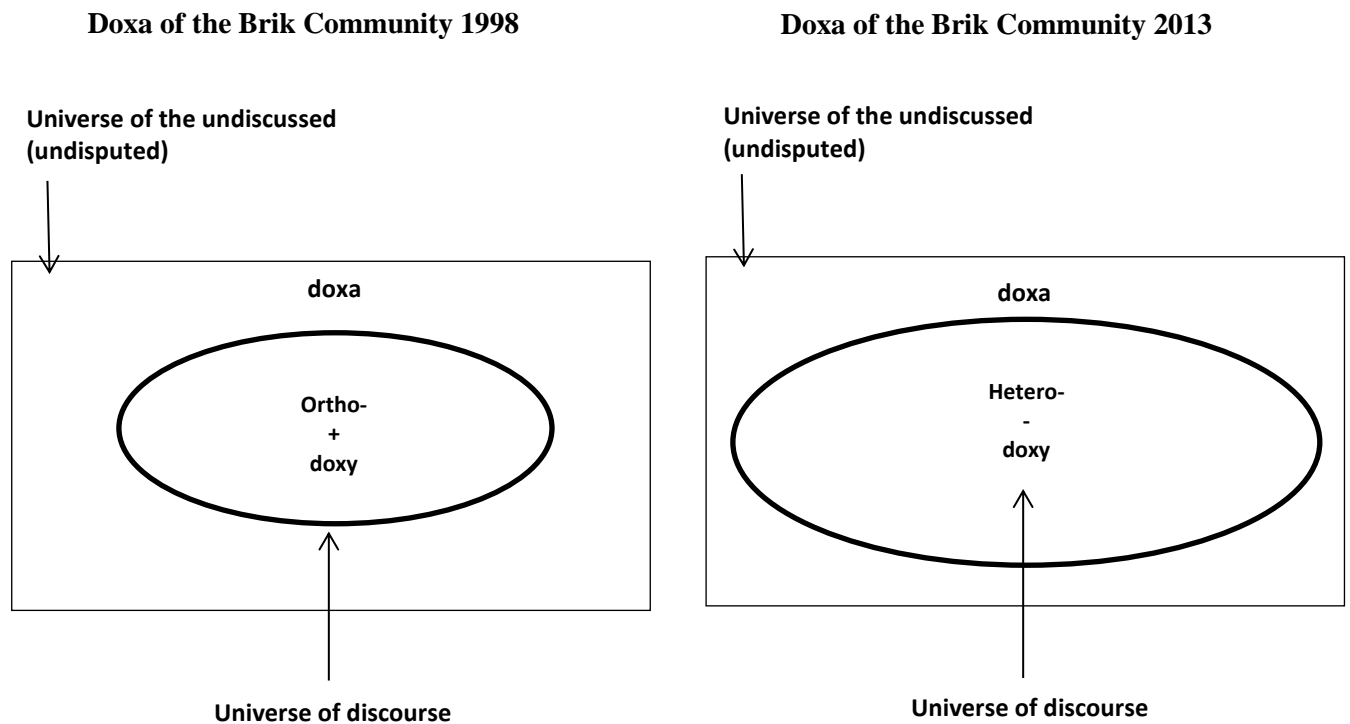
etic perception of it as a unified whole. In other words, despite conflicts amongst members, the existence of commonly accepted norms is sufficient to provide the group with a specific and concrete identity within the field, which, as exhibited in the previous chapters, contributes in the maintenance of boundaries from dissimilar others.

Going back to the increasing division of labour that occurred in the later years, partly due to routine and repetition and partly imposed by the need to manage the large number of volunteers, this constitutes a significant development from the “lighter framework where people knew what everyone had to do” that one of the respondents describes. In contrast, nowadays, administrative and financial practices are carried out in specific ways, defined by the commerce of the community and the need to make sure that the venue runs as smoothly as possible, if not for volunteers then at least for its publics. Practices have been structured in a significantly more organised manner, for example, rather than having one big shared programming team, there are now specialised teams that meet following a fixed timetable. Similarly, finances are carried out with identical procedures each week, the management of the booking and delivery of films is somewhat standardised, there are operations in place to do with the ordering of supplies and the stocking of the bar as well as the collection of recycling and the rota-system, which in the past tended to be filled on the day of the event, but is now managed by assigned members who try to avoid understaffing problems.

As Bourdieu would argue ([1977] 2002), structures exercised in such practices have been more and more confirmed and reinforced with the passage of time, extending the field of doxa. Of these, some remain undisputed and their importance, despite the experimental identity of the group, is recognised by most members, primarily because of the need to coordinate an increasing number of volunteers (who compared to the early days spend less time at the Brik and engage in fewer duties) as well as the need to introduce newcomers to an, at least partly, structured way of operating. Others, however, constitute points of negotiation within the group. Given the increased heterogeneity amongst members, including different personalities, cultural capital, background and reasons for volunteering, the number of practices that get questioned has increased in the later years. In the early days, despite the fact that the absence of any sort of formal structure or established practices left more space for disputes and debate, these were avoided because of the orthodoxy of group members. Today, “rules of the

game” are significantly more established, diminishing the space of the undisputed (see figure 4 below), yet the heterodoxy of its members generates constant tensions within the group. The evolution of doxa in the community is illustrated in the figure below:

Figure 4: The Evolution of Doxa



Figures adapted from Swartz (1997)

In relation to taste-making, what the evolution of doxa indicates is that within the context of a community whose operations have been well established with the passage of time, heterogeneity of members lifeworlds will still impose taste conflicts with regards to the “appropriate way of doing things” or the definition of the ingroup from its outgroups.

9.3 Heterodoxy as a Failure of the Community's Filtering Mechanism

At this point it is worth examining where this heterodoxy is attributed to by members themselves. On the one hand, those carrying politically charged views, consider the existence of the rest a result of the failure of the community to filter naturally its participants. In other words, while there aren't (and never have been) any formal requirements as to who can join in, it is considered that the nature of the space, including the worn building, manner of operation and environment in which the community functions, should "filter" out those not in line with the prevailing normative system by making them feel uncomfortable or unable to operate under the given conditions. More specifically, many members believe that joining should have as a prerequisite a certain familiarity and kinship with the space, which however is not the case for all new volunteers:

"People initially would be coming because they came to see something that interests them. So that is already a kind of introduction... it is already a sort of kinship that is happening and then they come a few more times, getting to talk to people and then decide to join - that seems to me a much healthier way. People can do their research and look into what it is or people come once and say "oh I love this space!" (Daniel)

From this standpoint, new volunteers who have joined without being aware of the history and ethos of the group should then be naturally self-regulated out of the community. Those with a politically charged view of the Brik explain the incompatibility of certain people with the nature of the community, expressing negativity and rejection towards those unable to understand the importance of complying with what a particular normative system dictates. The Brik's free form structure is not going to appeal to everyone, allowing some to thrive on it, while leading others, who cannot handle that way of working, to exit the group thinking that "this is not for me". Exclusion is a necessary process in protecting the community:

"I would guess or think in that self-regulating way, that someone who is... what I understand by superficiality, they are concerned about

surface and how others see them and what is the correct way of behaving in any given circumstance. So they are worried about being seen doing the one thing. So you are coming to an environment which is ambiguous and ill-defined and you can't cope with that if you feel like you have to behave in the correct way. So you would be naturally self-regulated out because it would be too challenging an environment."

(Max)

For others, these "self-regulating" aspects of the community are somewhat more troubling and less welcome. Rather than subtly praising the merits of natural filtering, these members focus on understanding *why* people may not feel comfortable in the space, expressing an interest in evangelising participants and preventing their exit from the group:

"We don't know why people leave; we sometimes talk about getting in contact with people and asking them. Kind of like an exit interview. Maybe if you are not in that mindset, maybe you just don't understand what the place is about. Or maybe you wouldn't be in a place to kind of articulate why it did not meet with you. I don't know. But then maybe if it doesn't match maybe you wouldn't come in the first place. So what is it that drives them away?" (Johnny)

The view that many of the new members are unable to cope within the community is supported by the high turnover of volunteers, for of the dozen people that I attended an induction with, only one was still present at the Brik at the time when I completed my research. Of the rest, the majority I never saw again after that first day, or I only encountered working on night shifts on a few occasions, disappearing soon after. Throughout my time at the Brik I also came across a number of volunteers who I would only see once in the venue, never to re-appear again, and who seemed to be excluded from interactions amongst the senior members, much like a child on its first day of school. Similarly to what I experienced, existing members who were set in their ways would rarely, if ever, go out of their way to include and accommodate a new volunteer, making the process of "going native" a daunting task for newcomers. In the end, many of the individuals who managed to "survive" their first shifts and kept coming back

were (a) either those with personal connections to existing volunteers or some other form of relationship with the community preceding their attempt to volunteer (for example they had been at the Brik as performers) and for whom “fitting in” the group was a far smoother process due to increased social capital, or (b) those whose main occupation was arts related and as such, experience and cultural capital would allow them to contribute to the group without having undergone much training and without taking as much time to familiarise themselves with processes.

The survival of members who are little or not at all familiar with the Brik’s history before joining and who are coming from a different ideological space than the majority of the older members, is interpreted by some as a failure of the filtering mechanism. Of these newcomers, some manage eventually to integrate with the group and get on board with the existing ethos by learning through intense participation and by forming what Bourdieu refers to as a “straightened opinion” (Bourdieu [1977] 2002, 169).

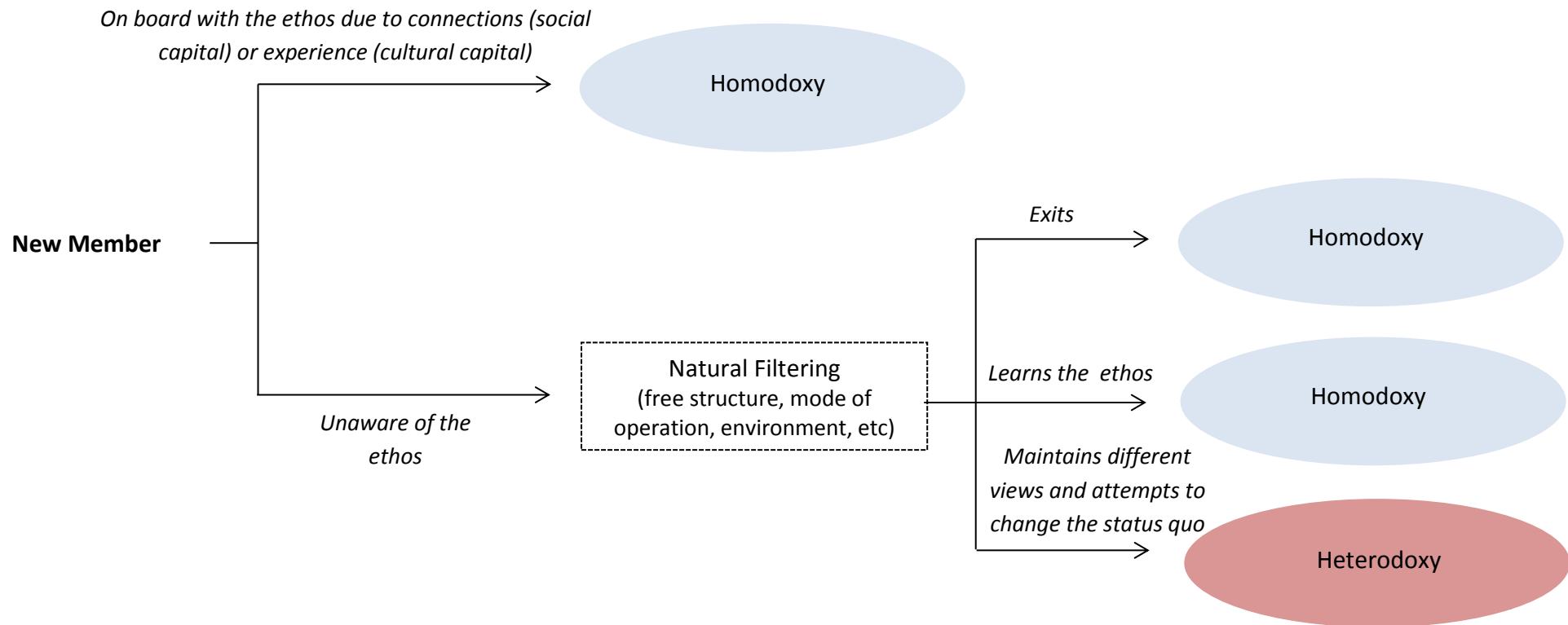
“In the past there was this kind idea that it was "the way of the Brik" which was not written down and you could not define it or write it down but it was in the air. That was the sort of spirit we did things and approached culture and did art and events. So some new people really get that. Or sometimes they don’t get it at all. Sometimes even old people don’t get it.” (Daniel)

Others, however, maintain a different view of the venue as an alternative, yet entertainment space, interpreting the disagreement of the rest as “resistance to change”, exhibited primarily by longstanding members:

“I think that on the flip side there is kind of an “old Brik” view. There are some people who have been there a very long time and seem very much against change as a default position. I don’t know what their motivations are and they seem to be different in each case. But there are some people who want it to stay the same and that can be difficult.” (Neal)

The disturbance of homodoxy (and in extension to this, homodoxy of tastes) by the insertion of new members is illustrated in the figure below:

Figure 5: Maintaining/Disturbing Homodoxy with the Insertion of New Members



9.4 Structure, Power and Hierarchy

As it will become obvious in the remainder of this chapter, members of the community, despite being part of an organisation with a seemingly flat hierarchy, do not all have the same power in influencing dominant tastes and their actualisation. At this point, it is worth examining the factors that contribute to some members' higher influential power, the role of the community's structure in this unequal power distribution and how these conditions potentially transform the relevance of members' classification into core, marginal and peripheral (Wenger et al. 2002).

Despite the organisational structure being dictated by the ethos of the cooperative movement, in casual conversations as well as interviews I never came across a volunteer who did not admit the existence of an unequal power structure in the group and the formation of an informal hierarchy. Some would accept this as the "natural order of things", stating their disbelief that a seemingly flat structure would be more beneficial for the group or would even be achievable:

"In a way it is a contradiction. I mean like I say everyone in the Brik is equal but sometimes in the words of George Orwell, some people are more equal than others. Whether that delivers or not... I think unfortunately it is inevitable. In the most idealistic of communities there is always going to be some.... even if it is not explicit, it is always going to be some kind of struggle going on. It just seems to be a natural, unfortunately, part of how humans operate." (Mark)

Members attribute this inevitable formation of an informal hierarchy to inequalities in social and cultural capital, as well as to an underlying meritocratic system operating in the group:

"Technically it is a workers coop but in actual practice we struggle with that idea. Some of the ideas are from the ideology of the cooperative movement, like workers ownership and equal say sort of thing. They apply but at the same time you have to have hierarchies in a way, even if they are creative hierarchies or personality hierarchies. If it would just

be a coop and we did everything by the book, we would not be here.”

(Daniel)

Daniel states “creativity” as one of the main factors that inevitably lead to unequal power structures. Indeed, those with higher and more relevant (sub)cultural capital have been able to establish themselves quickly as “influential” members, whose tastes are respected by the group and whose knowledge intimidates those lacking the relevant experience. As I stated earlier, the distinction between high and low cultural capital members is primarily to be traced to individuals’ background (not unlike what Bourdieu (1984) suggests), primarily education and main occupation, with those considering their main job to be within the domain of the arts significantly overpowering those with more conventional occupations. This is not only due to those members’ ability to engage in debates that require specialty knowledge to be participated in or their ability to assume quickly a lot of responsibility in “key” positions (e.g. programmer), but also to the recognition of this cultural capital superiority by others:

“It takes a while to get confidence. You lack education about the way the community works but also understanding about music, film and art in the same way as others do. I think a lot of the new volunteers don’t feel they have it and therefore don’t feel that they should express an opinion.” (Neal)

A second factor driving the unequal power distribution, and one that is based on the principles of a meritocratic system, is participation. Membership in the group, despite the “equal say” principle that is “key” in the cooperative movement and that is also assumed by the community, in practice means nothing. It is participation in itself that gives credibility and power to a member, accompanied by a moving dynamic based on personality, with some people voicing their opinions a little louder than others.

As such, inevitably, those with a more longstanding service find themselves to have significantly more credibility, power and ultimately influence, given their track record of having “proven” themselves through participation. Similarly to what the literature describes, subcultural members who have more experience, expertise and higher levels of responsibility are attributed greater status (Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993; Leigh, Peters

and Shelton 2006; Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1990). In the Brik community, everyone has got responsibility. Even during my first days, when working on a particular role during events, I always felt the responsibility of carrying that role out appropriately and in the same manner as I would if I was earning a living from this job. But naturally a newer member's responsibilities are not the same as someone who understands and manages aspects of the building (e.g. the keyholder responsible for opening or closing on each night) and similarly a key holder does not have the same responsibility as a director, who while not "technically" in charge has serious legal responsibility.

Longstanding members, constituted of those people who have been involved in every sort of role and on every level, have proven themselves and have "earned" the right to what is perceived to be a stronger veto, a louder "no" in negotiations of any kind, including what is perceived to be an "appropriate" way of running the venue, what is aesthetically fitting with the Brik and what is the best programming mix. Given these conditions, these members are able to deny power to newer participants who may threaten to transform practices which are important to those who have invested in them (Carlisle 2004). As Coopey (1995) and Coopey and Burgoyne (2000) argue, dominant members able to control better and manipulate community resources as well as rhetorical and interpersonal devices, pursue their enterprises and promote their perceptions of tastefulness at the expense of those in more marginal positions.

"Proving" oneself, however, is not a principle that is in accordance with all members, especially given that part of the Brik's ethos and part of what disassociates the group from outsiders is its seemingly flat structure and "equal say" principle. Consequently, those with less power, i.e. lower cultural capital, less longstanding service, are left frustrated with the barriers they encounter in actualising their tastes.

"I guess that some people like being in control over the programme... If not distrust, there is a wariness of people with new ideas... Which I guess backs up with the thing that people don't like change. And people can make claims to be somewhere really dynamic and different but actually there are kind of unspoken rules and norms set in place." (Neal)

Neal interprets intra-group struggles as “resistance to change” on behalf of some of the longstanding members. His realisation concerning the existence of “unspoken rules” and an informal hierarchy partly dilutes his perception of the community’s purpose as aiming to “make a difference” comparing to dissociative outsiders:

“People take suggestions to the programming meeting and if you like, if they are approved by the “old guard” then they will get into the programming. If it does not fit their ideas, it won't.” (Penny)

Tensions amongst members are further enforced when the extreme influence of practices by those with more power is clearly at odds with the group’s supposedly flat structure:

“We are supposed to be a workers cooperative, we are supposed to all have the same vote and yet there are people there who can shoot an idea down straight away just by voicing a negative opinion and that is because they do kind of wheel a bit more power, despite the fact that they should not.” (Neal)

Unequal power distribution becomes a source of frustration also in cases when those with more influence are numerically less than those in favour of a particular proposal. From this standpoint, and as it will be explained later in more detail, the “consensus” principle favours those whose expressions of distaste and rejection are stronger than that of the majority.

Finally, a question that arises is why does the community put forward the image of a seemingly flat structure, when all of the members that I interacted with are well aware that informal hierarchies are in place? In fact members display a clear negation of this, at least in public, with regards to the matter:

“I don’t think flat structures exist... it is a fantasy. Most people would be horrified though; I don't say these things at meetings.” (Frances)

Maintaining the perception of the group as a flat organisation certainly sustains the identity of the community from an etic point of view. It complies with the goal of “making a difference” by demarcating it from conventional structures and freeing members from the bonds of a system where the goals of those at the top (usually profit related and as such distasteful for the ingroup) define the practices of the community as a whole. Accordingly, admittance of the existence of hierarchy is denied due to its potentially damaging effect on the actualisation of “us and them” tensions.

Going back to struggles about doxa, Bourdieu (1972) suggests that those who occupy dominant positions and those who are in subservient positions share a silent acceptance of the field, their role in it and the rules of engagement. In the case of the Brik, doxa is challenged by newer, yet very active, members and is not accepted as self-evident (as it is by peripheral ones). As explained earlier, this is further enforced by the “flat hierarchy” of the cooperative, which dictates an equal say to all volunteers in the decision making and running of the community, as well as by the fact that on multiple occasions the “dominated” outnumber the “dominant”. Paraphrasing Bourdieu ([1977] 2002, 169) “the dominated have an interest in pushing back the limits of doxa and exposing the arbitrariness of the taken for granted (especially since there are no fixed principles in place); while the dominant have an interest in defending the integrity of doxa and its realisation or, short of this, of establishing in its place the necessarily imperfect substitute – orthodoxy”.

From this standpoint, the division of members into core/marginal/peripheral (suggested by Wegner et al. 2002) is inadequate in classifying participants in this context. Peripheral members - newer participants who only casually get involved in the Brik - indeed fit this classification. However the distinction between core and marginal is somewhat different to what the authors describe. According to Wegner et al (2002), the core is a small group of very active members who inevitably take on leadership roles, while marginal members are active participants who are regularly involved but lack the intensity of the core group. In the case of the Brik community, both the dominant (which logically coincides with the core) and dominated (marginal/peripheral) members are intensively participating in the community. The difference is to be found in the amount of power possessed by each group, with dominant members having a

rather longstanding service and high cultural capital and the dominated a less lengthy service informed by less field related capital.

In addition to this, the division between longstanding and newer members, while largely accurate, can still be negated by “falsifying” cases. More specifically, my observations have traced occasions when the views and goals of a member with more longstanding service coincide with those of newer members (for example by prioritising pleasure or the social aspect of the group over more political causes), while the odd vice-versa case may be true of a newer member, in other words a newly joined participant may be on board with views usually associated with longstanding members.

Accordingly, the best explanatory power in the classification of participants is to be found in their amount of field related cultural capital. As such, a more relevant division is that between “devotees” (those with high subcultural capital and who are *faithfully* dedicated to the mission of experimentation and radicalism as explained in chapter 7), “appropriators” (those with less cultural capital, who while on board with the collective’s regime, seek to *appropriate* the normative system in order to satisfy their less politically-driven goals) and “marginals” (those who only casually participate and are indifferent to the normative system). While this classification is made according to the degree of adherence to the regime that drives practice, taking into account the relevance of cultural capital for all layers of volunteers, this is simultaneously a power classification, with those in the middle possessing the highest influence in matters of taste and with power diminishing towards the outer layers. The classification is used in the remaining of this chapter.

9.5 Struggles of Ideology

Heterodoxy of tastes within the group is primarily to be traced in the diversity of volunteers’ “readings” of the community. Devotees view the Brik as an artists’ space with a political orientation, that provides individuals with a platform to experiment and explore and that ultimately aims to “open up people’s minds”. In contrast, appropriators perceive it as an entertainment venue which should provide pleasure and alternative opportunities for socialising for members as well as for its publics. In this section, I take

a closer look at the struggles of ideology within the group that aim to shape its dominant culture and in extension the tastes through which that culture will be actualised.

As described extensively in chapter 7, working collectively and autonomously is a practice of grave significance for community members, especially when juxtaposing the group with dissociative others in the field of the arts. Surprisingly, while this is interpreted as a political statement by some, the political connotation of the group's way of operating is overlooked by others. I asked one of the participants to explain why this is the case:

“If you mean kind of party political then no. If you mean in terms of civic life and having a civic identity and therefore kind of political then I do yes. It is a hard thing to define you know. If you say political, a lot of people at the Brik now will say it is not political at all, and they hate that debate, because their understanding of political means social workers party or communism or these established discourses... They think political means taking some position in terms of Politics with a capital P. Which isn't what we mean at all so it is a difficult one to flesh out because most people don't have an understanding of it that way, even though they are participating in it so they are working there, volunteering or freely giving their time and their labour. And sometime you just wonder why are they doing that? What are they gaining from it? They might see a film or listen to some music...” (Daniel)

Daniel points out the inability of some members to understand the political statement made by the group through its way of operation as an autonomous cooperative. From this point of view, the Brik community is a political entity whose core identity is not only defined by its positioning against other entertainment venues in the city, but also by the equality and shared rights of its members, the consensus based decision making processes in place and the rejection of structural hierarchies (at least formal ones) that direct the course of action of the participants. While he may recognise the merits of the artistic, social and hedonistic sides of the group, Daniel's account prioritises the importance of civic identity by expressing confusion as to why some members engage in what he perceives to be civic action when they do not identify with the group's civic

identity. For devotees, identification with that civic identity seems to be a necessary prerequisite for everyone participating, generating a questioning response against members who do not.

Confirming Daniel's view that some participants misinterpret any discussion about the political side of the group as necessarily taking a political stance, one of the respondents states:

"Politics is not even discussed very much because obviously it does not have to. Like I said pretty much most of us are the guardian-reading sort of types. So the political side of it doesn't really even, doesn't come into it I think." (Jack)

In Jack's account it becomes obvious that diversity of opinions is not to do with members disidentifying with the group's civic identity but negating its existence, interpreting it not as a way of governance but as taking sides with political parties. That is, Jack sees members as homogenous in terms of their political views, which he justifies by citing their media preference for a newspaper renowned for its middle class, mainstream-left audience. By generalising the political profile of the Brik participants, Jack dismisses the need to even discuss politics in what he perceives to be a relatively homogenous group.

The sharply contrasting accounts of the two members are illustrative of a divide that concerns both members' perceptions of the "community's place" and the debates regarding the manner in which the group operates as well as which practices are tastefully fitting or deemed to be inappropriate. For some, the political "reading" of the community constitutes the main indicator of its social standing:

"I see the Brik as primarily a ground of how to operate collectively, that is its purpose for me. All of the cinema stuff, that is just a kind of a pretext. Training on how to operate collectively, *that* to me is goal of the Brik. Decommodifying entertainment, that is also really important to see. And the complete continuity between the staff, the audience and the performers." (Frances)

France's perception of the community is politically charged due to the importance that the respondent places in the de-fetishisation of the cinema experience (and thus the "unmasking" of the artifice of commodified entertainment and the "true" socioeconomic purpose that it serves) and the presumption opportunities cultivated by the group (rather than engaging solely in alienated consumption of one's leisure time, members are encouraged to participate fully by both consuming and producing). Her insistence on the importance of the function of the group over that of its artistic offering, further justifies the juxtaposition of the Brik community with actors located in fields outside the art world. In other words, for those members for whom the civic identity of the group overtakes its artistic, social or hedonistic sides, it is not surprising that focal points for comparison, rather than involving other arts organisations, concern workers cooperatives (collectives perceived to have a similar civic life) and the whole of society (perceived to be operating under civic nationalism).

In an attempt to understand the motivation of members who engage in action with the community without identifying strongly with the group's civic identity, one of the participant states:

"The majority of people who work there all come for probably...are more there for the social side of things which obviously is a very important part of it but I think a lot of people just...I don't wanna put it down but they are there because it is a good way of meeting people when you first move to Bristol. But the kind of political ideology behind the Brik in that it is quite unique in being a completely volunteer run organisation that as a matter of principle does not take funding should also be very important to them." (Patrick)

Patrick recognises the social side of things as an important motivating force for all members of the group, yet one which should not overshadow the ideological roots of the community. Indeed, across the respondents' accounts participation in the Brik seems to be motivated by numerous factors that I have mentioned above, including, sociability, entertainment, passing one's leisure time and making a political statement, yet these factors do not carry equal "weight". At the extremes of this heterodoxy, there are those

who largely dismiss some of these motivations (at the one extreme prioritising the “political aspects” of the Brik and at the other the “entertainment” side of it), with the majority of participants giving at least some merit to the views of the “other side”.

Heterodoxy is not limited in disagreements about the nature of the community but also extends to debates about what the main purpose that it should serve is. Devotees place an emphasis on creativity, experimentation and the challenge of conventional practices. For appropriators, on the other hand, while acknowledging the importance of “making a difference”, this is complemented by a perception of the community as an entertainment venue. Taking into account the latter, the corporate face of the community and its “responsibility” towards its publics get prioritised:

“So there is a core group of people on the one side who would say it is an artist space, run by artists for artists, and that's the whole point of it. It is not there to serve any other purpose whatsoever, to create art and show art to the community. And then you get another group of people who probably say completely the opposite and that it is there to serve the audience.” (Neal)

One of my participants provides her own interpretation of the ideological tensions occurring in the group:

“There is a group of... let's call them idealists, who are very big on “The Brik is for artists” and a group of pragmatists if you like. The pragmatists are basing their thinking on experience. And the idealists are basing it on their ideals whatever they might be. And it is like never the twain shall meet you know?” (Penny)

The two groups whose views are described as “incompatible” in Neal and Penny's accounts distinguish between those who place an emphasis on the prosumption of the offering (and incidentally those whose main jobs I have identified in the previous section as being primarily within the arts domain) as the main drive of the community and those who, while appreciative of the prosumption side of their role, view the delivery of the offering for consumption by the audience as of primary importance. In

other words, while the Brik is open to the public, openly inviting an audience to exchange their economic capital for cultural capital generated by the group, appropriators take a significantly more evangelical approach, whereas devotees are excluding. This is summarised in Mark's account:

"I think everyone has got a different idea of how the Brik works and how it should work. Some people are quite politically motivated and see that the Brik is a political mass and other people are looking at it as an entertainment venue, where we are getting people to pay to come and see events that we put on. So they expect a certain level of entertainment and value for money, whereas other people would say that we are opening people's minds to other things so they should be happy to pay."
(Mark)

Those evangelising an audience believe that they carry a responsibility towards their publics in relation to the delivery of a value for money offering, directed by the principles of commerce and, while not necessarily giving up the alternative nature of the group, look up to the operations of the more mainstream venues. Those excluding on the other hand, are not in strict terms preventing a wider (i.e. non-artist) audience from attending the venue, especially since the economic-cultural exchange is essential to the survival of the group, but deny any responsibility in serving those publics. That is, the evangelising group uses their experience and logic to offer a service that is "up to standard" for their audience, whereas the excluding group focuses on what their "ideals" dictate to be of worth for *themselves*, "allowing" those of a similar mindset to benefit by this production of cultural capital in exchange for a fee.

9.6 Struggles of "Doings"

Struggles of ideology inevitably transform to struggles about "doings", in other words tensions arise when members are to decide upon the enactment and realisation of their ideas. Differences of opinion are not unrelated to the discourses that drive the distinction between the community and its dissociative others as was recognised in chapter 7. While these discourses constitute the community's doxa, the degree to which

members insist on their flawless realisation varies significantly, resulting in intense disagreements that concern the group's main offering and its running and operations. In other words, devotees idealise the normative system that guides their practice and enforces the group's distinction, believing in the importance of its flawless execution. For them, any deviation from the regime threatens to jettison what are considered to be the collective's "core values", primarily its commitment to autonomy, radicalism and de-fetishisation of the domain. Appropriators on the other hand, described as "pragmatists" by some of the respondents in the accounts presented earlier, while in line with the same normative system and recognising its value in setting apart the group from "them", argue in favour of a "looser" interpretation of the regime. These members take into account the pragmatic needs of the group, including financial viability, facilitation of operations, as well as their quest for entertainment and pleasure.

Interestingly, all members consider their interpretation of the regime to be in the community's best interest and the interpretation of their adversaries to be threatening to the group. Those "idealising" the normative system consider the practices of the rest to be compromising the Brik's identity. Antithetically, from the standpoint of the latter, blind adherence to a regime is threatening to the collective's survival. Consequent debates about "doings" and taste actualisations occur within the physical space that hosts the group, through informal conversations and in formally set volunteers meetings but equally, and perhaps most intensively, through the virtual forum for decision making, namely the volunteer mailing list. Debates, rather than being expressed through highly vocal quarrels take the form of the exchanging of well-informed arguments, which perhaps explains my inability to trace struggles during my first months as a volunteer. Respondent accounts from the in-depth interviews as well as from the mailing list are presented below, organised according to which aspects of the normative system members perceive that they serve or need to challenge on each occasion.

9.6.1 Bureaucracy vs. Facilitation of Operations

Similarly to what I described in chapter 6, when I sought access to the Brik and decided to volunteer in order to gain an "insider's" perspective, I was first invited to attend an induction along with a dozen other newcomers. Inductions constitute an

organised manner of welcoming new participants. For me, attendance served the purpose that an “orientation” at a new university or work environment would. It taught me what kind of roles I could get involved with and answered my questions as to whether I needed any particular skills in order to carry out aspects of those roles. It was also explained how I could sign up to help at an event of my choice and during the induction I was able to see, at least to some extent, why existing volunteers enjoy being part of the group as well as why new members want to join in. Most importantly, having only been to the Brik once before and being a complete outsider to its social milieu, mingling with other newcomers who were previously unconnected to the space, eased my anxieties of not fitting in and facilitated my introduction to the group through the realisation that “outsiders” were also welcomed. Given the fact that individuals with previous connections to the group (via volunteer friends or by having performed there on previous occasions) would rarely formally attend inductions, the process in itself is an example of evangelising members and allowing access not only to those with sufficient amounts of social and cultural capital, but also to anyone wishing to join in. The role of the induction, however, is not interpreted by all as a facilitating, welcoming or appropriate praxis:

“I think the sort of induction process has come out of someone coming in whose personal passion is sort of bureaucracy and so they are sort of imposing that will, shaped in this certain way.” (Max)

Max’s account dismisses any positive outcomes of the induction process and focuses on how its implementation signals an unwanted adherence to structured processes on behalf of the community. His branding of the process as distasteful and inappropriate has its roots in the group’s joint enterprise of radicalism, not only in relation to its creative offering, but also its manner of operation. Taking an extreme stance, Max sets aside any pragmatic need for the existence of the process and perceives it as compromising for the group. On a second instance, the complete dismissal of an induction process can also be interpreted as indifference against the attraction of newcomers who were previously unconnected to the space. According to Max, this is in line with the idea that volunteering should emerge naturally and only after interested individuals have been educated with regards to what the space is all about by often attending events and building relations with existing members.

Similarly to the induction process, the “volunteers guide”, an informative leaflet distributed to all newcomers providing basic information about the running of the community as well as instructions on how to carry out various roles, has been under scrutiny. Contested meanings with regards to the purpose that the leaflet serves are present in the account below:

“There was a member that was very angry that any documentation about how to run the Brik had been created. But I actually think that I don’t agree. Because, for instance they disagreed that we should have... - when you start becoming a volunteer, you get the guide on how to do Front of House - I don’t think that is really impacting any ideology I think that it is central to have instructions on how to open the doors and how to run the till. Realistically how would the Brik run without any...? You could say that we pass on the information and we do do that to an extent. But that is very time consuming and also sometimes not practical. I find that guide very, very useful.” (Lisa)

In contrast to what is perceived as “bureaucratic” by devotees, the induction process and leaflet is interpreted as “necessary” and “practical” by appropriators, seeing the former as wrongly construing it as threatening to the group’s distinction. In her account Lisa also expresses her inability to understand why the existence of such facilitating tools could dilute the community’s normative system and focuses entirely on a pragmatic reading of these matters.

On a similar note, a major point of negotiation amongst members has been the role of technology in the facilitation of daily operations. This is exemplified in the example of the debate concerning the potential transferring of the paper rota (a document where volunteers sign up to carry out a particular role on a particular event/date) to being online, so that members are able to sign up for roles without the need to be in the building at the time of scheduling. The paper rota is a central tool in the management of daily operations as staffing for all events is dependent on it. It has traditionally been located in the Brik’s office, hanging on a nail on the wall, where it is accessible to anyone who wants either to sign up or check its status to trace possible instances of

understaffing that need to be managed (usually with urgent calls for roles to fill up via the mailing list). The suggestion of some members to create an online version of the rota was justified by the practicalities that such an action would serve, primarily, to simplify the signing up for roles, but would also prevent the occasional understaffed nights that could lead to cancelled events. I asked one of the participants who are in favour of the online rota to explain the profound resistance of some members:

“People are against it, people are saying that it is the heart of the Brik and that people come in to look at the rota... I don’t think people do but you know, maybe they do. And there is this argument that if we go online it will somehow become less social because if people can log into it from home, they don’t have a reason to come to the Brik. But I don’t think that is true. I don’t think that people come in just to check the rota, I think people come in to see friends and hang out. So that is probably rubbish anyway.” (Neal)

As Neal suggests, the moving of the rota to a virtual environment is rejected by other members out of fear that it will prevent volunteers from physically going to the Brik to sign up for roles, thus threatening the social character of the community and its focus on operating collectively. In this case, it seems that the social character of online communities is not accepted by some members as a viable alternative and importance is placed on the physical space. At this point it is also worth considering why some participants perceive the rota to be “the heart of the Brik”. First, the rota and the clipboard to which it is attached constitute somewhat a surviving artefact that has transcended years at the Brik, having served generations of volunteers. When the clipboard is unhooked from the nail, the wall reveals a painted outline of the rota and a message within it reading “where is the rota?” indicating the importance of it in the running of the venue. From this standpoint the historicity of the artefact constitutes it an everlasting object that silently witnesses the evolution of the community, connecting in some metaphysical manner all members that have passed from the group. Second, the rota and the purpose it serves (coordinating which person will carry out which role) constitute a symbol of the cooperative and one of its main joint enterprises, namely working collectively. As such, its replacement by an intangible “convenient” version is considered to be distasteful, a sell-out of the community’s soul.

Those focusing on the practical considerations of the migration indeed have grounds for their arguments, as on many occasions the physical rota proves to be compromising for the successful execution of events:

“Someone had put on a bands night and he needed a projectionist cause they had visuals behind the band. But for whatever reasons when the rota got printed off it did not pull through a projectionist so no one knew that they needed one and he did not know he had a gap. Cause when we look at the rota we see where the gaps are. If there isn’t a gap you just assume you have one. And he could not get in during the week, so he came in on Friday, no projectionist, the band could have turned around and say we are not playing. You know they bring a visual person on tour with them, it is a big deal. And he said look if this was online, I could have logged in from home on Tuesday or Thursday or whenever, see there was no projectionist and deal with it. And for me that on its own is enough reason to do it. Because I don’t think it will change anything else in a positive or a negative way.” (Neal)

Or acting as a motivation for volunteers to sign up:

“Not everybody lives in walking distance of the Brik, they can’t pop in and put their names on the rota which can put you off.” (Penny)

From the viewpoint of devotees, however, the use of technology in the facilitation of operations should be applied with caution:

“I see it as it (technology) needs to be. Very technical, very - we need the lights to go on, we need the doors to open and we need all the tech to really run very humbly and submissively in the background. Just to work. So the people can then organize themselves on top of that. There is a real danger from my point of view from the facebook generation, that people see this idea, that they can sit at home and do all sorts of stuff... the Brik is all about being together in the space and I see this

sort of like, it is a compromise clearly. When things can work with a pen and paper they should.” (Frances)

Frances perceives the role of technology as “facilitator” to be threatening the group. She disassociates the “ideal” Brik volunteer, an active participant who contributes to the empowerment of the community by collaborating with others, from passive individuals of the “facebook generation”. Accordingly, her religious compliance to the normative system works in an “us and them” fashion by proclaiming the superiority of this mode of operation (as opposed to that of society), only the perceived “threat” in this instance is not solely to be located in “them”, but also in “some of us”.

9.6.2 Experimentation vs. Hedonism

Similar divisions occur when appraising the tastes of various members for putting on particular events. The programming team at the Brik, which is responsible for deciding which films/performances/exhibitions will be put on as well as for managing these events, is made up of a few older members who have given long-lasting service to the community and the programming stream in particular as well as numerous newer volunteers. The group is open for participation to everyone, complying with the principles of the Brik’s formally flat hierarchy, it informally requires, however, that anyone wishing to put on an event exhibits a certain amount of commitment, first by attending the relevant meetings in addition to shadowing event managers in order to become familiar with what is entailed when putting on an event, and last but not least, being able to provide a suitable rationale for the suggestion of a particular event for inclusion in the programme. The latter is required to make sure that the suggested spectacle “fits” with the community’s norms, that it is in fact a “Brik kind of event”, which sufficiently matches the group’s social position and signifies this to outsiders. Debates centred on the offering are of particular importance given the high visibility of the programming to outside actors.

As suggested in the previous chapter, programming does not entail a straightforward approval or rejection of events, but a complex process of appraisal as to whether a suggestion can be appropriated sufficiently to match the community’s joint

enterprise(s). In this section, however, I focus on those cases when suggested events constitute an instant “red flag” for other participants, leading to intense debates about the nature of “what we do”.

“I am particularly interested in history of cinema, classic films and I think that there is a large audience out there for those films. So for example “20th century flicks”⁴ generally get pretty good audiences and I have been showing 30s and 40s comedies and have been getting good audiences for those, people who come specifically to see the film rather than the stand up. When I suggested this I was bombarded with emails that kind of said to me “these ideas of yours are unchallenging, safe, predictable, boring and they don’t fit with the Brik, which is a radical experimental space. I have lost count of the number of times people have said to me “don’t do it like that, if you go look at the programmes for the last 2 years you will understand what we do”, which is a kind of bizarrely, rigid way to approach programming, that what *was* is what must be. I find it very odd. So essentially, those people yeah have been there a very long time and seem to feel this gives them a right to issue advice and instruction.” (Penny)

As explained in the previous chapter, some members’ passion for old Hollywood movies only became acceptable when these were showcased as part of a comedy night event. In the above account, one of the members in support of the offering explains her frustration with the rejection of the idea by others, citing as a reason her belief that there is an audience interested in the offering without its stand-up comedy spin. The resistance faced on the matter can be traced to the belief that this particular offering would not be in line with a regime that directs radicalism and experimentation. In the words of one of the volunteers:

“I think there is a problem with people coming in who want to do a sort of rep cinema thing and not understanding the sort of history and ethos.

⁴ A monthly event held at the Brik, in conjuncture with a local video club. It showcases “classic” films, chosen by members of the video club.

And then being told “well this doesn’t really fit” and just being frustrated.” (Max)

Opposing devotee members also use the “status quo” (in this case the history of programming) as an argument for their ruling out the suggestion (“this does not fit with what we have been doing so far”), which however, is dismissed by newer members who argue in favour of change and constitutes a source of frustration:

“I just find it absolutely amazing that the whole history of cinema can be disregarded as predictable and unchallenging.” (Penny)

In their accounts, appropriators in favour of altering – or to be more specific “opening up” the offering - believe that this should be feasible given that “if this is what some of us are passionate about then that should be sufficient reason to include it in the programme”.

“If we filter everything down to this idea of what the Brik *should* be we will just have one boring... the programme would be the same every month and that for me is not very interesting or fun. But unfortunately the way it does work is that people shout and argue with each other for ages and it creates loads of discontent and you upset people, it is just pointless and stupid but it happens.” (Neal)

From the standpoint of devotees, however, acceptance of members’ tastes solely on the basis that these are enjoyed by members and a wider public, threatens the community’s distinction:

“I think it's a mistake to aim to do or show things that would be considered classically "commercial" - especially when these are (increasingly) available elsewhere (...) I would say, if not in the short-run, then definitely in the longer-term they have a negative impact on the perception of The Brik as something genuinely different.” (Account from Mailing List)

“We need to live up to our self-image, our self-reputation of really doing more inventive programming” (Account from Mailing List)

The key division between experimentation and pleasure is not a solely internal discussion concerning the displayed status of the community via its offering, but extends outside the Brik family to its publics, bringing once again the excluding/evangelising debate into the picture. In the account below a participant describes what she perceives to be a controversy between the wide artistic offering (in terms of types of events, genres, activities etc) of the community and what some members consider to be a rather limited, appropriately “educated” audience:

“If you look at the Brik from outside as a customer, the programme is very eclectic, there are many different kinds of events that appeal to many different groups of people, but actually the longstanding members of the film programming team, although they never articulated it at all until very recently, are aiming for a particular art house experimental, radical cinema. There is a view that we are programming for a kind of small, smallish in numbers, audience that is interested in experimental cinema. (...) I did point out recently that we had three documentaries about artists and that it was a bit samey. And I think they had a rethink after the meeting. Whether the programme changed, I don’t know. We tend not to think about the shape of the programme. Having a lot of documentaries all in one month, I personally think it is probably a mistake because you are appealing to a specific, smaller group of our audience. And so I have in my head that other people are picking it up and thinking “oh there is nothing to watch this month”.” (Penny)

Penny’s evangelical approach questions why some of the members prefer to perceive their offering as “for a limited audience only” and why the diversity of the publics is to some extent negated. She also expresses a worry as to whether a very specialised programming mix might put off a wider audience. On the other hand, unsolicited accounts of members who place all their attention on this “limited audience” reveal that the existence of the wider publics is not negated, but is attributed to the occasional showcase of inappropriate, commercial films upon insistence of some volunteers. In the

words of one member, for anyone “not in the right mindset” the specialised offering of the Brik is not going to be appealing. Following the principle of “like attracting like”, the idealists fear that by having commercial events that attract a more mainstream audience there is a “real danger of losing the community’s experimental edge”. The debate between the two views is important in directing what kind of purpose programming choices are serving:

“I mean, there is enough of a community there with 13.000 members, we got our audience just within that group, we don’t even have to go wider than that. Though what is interesting is how we constantly do get new members all the time, so there are still people arriving every week, despite the fact that it has been around 14 years, who have never been there before. And there is a bit of a tension sometimes between those two sort of ideas... the idea that we should be catering for our sort of base, existing base, or we should be reaching out to new people. I mean we do both and maybe it does not matter which one is more emphasised.” (Johnny)

Schau et al. (2009) have argued that evangelising practices of communities generate symbolic value by enlarging their human base and consequently cultivating a positive image for the group at the outset. Within the Brik community, however, a number of members see the evangelising approach as potentially destructive for the status of the group, retracting symbolic value and threatening to soften the boundaries from dissimilar actors with a “mass” human base. Similarly to what Bourdieu (1984) argues, distinction is defined by the very process of exclusion and inaccessibility. In cases when inaccessibility cannot be achieved through financial means (exclusion through affordability), it gets reinforced through outsiders’ inability to master the “code” (field-related capital) that prevails in the group, leaving them alienated and unable to participate.

9.6.3 Financial Security vs. Creativity

The divide between catering to an existing audience or reaching out to new people, as described by Penny, while indicative of the attempts of some appropriators to evangelise wider publics in the community and of devotees to maintain a more exclusive social milieu for the group, is also touching upon another point of conflict that I encountered in the community, namely the prioritising of creativity over that of financial security. As explained in chapter 7, the autonomous nature of the group is one of the key practices that demarcates the community from a variety of dissociative others. Following this principle, while rejection of any form of external funding is a commonly accepted norm that leaves no space for misinterpretation, generating income from own practices is an idea that bears different degrees of importance for members and underlies taste making both in the selection of artistic offerings as well as in the services that form part of the offered experience.

For some members the rule of thumb when programming is: “if it is artistically interesting then we will do it”. For others, this is a much more conscious process, bringing into the discussion the “voice of reason”, primarily through the idea that the group needs to make money out of its programming choices. Penny explains the necessity of including commercial and more popular films in programming that may be available in other cinemas in the city, and expresses her frustration with those dismissing that necessity:

“Necessity requires us sometimes to show films that don’t quite fit. And the Brik has got to survive in the long term and it needs money. So those kinds of films are absolutely an essential part of the mix. So you got a film programming team that has blinkers on if you like and conducts all its debate in those terms, “its got to be experimental, mustn't be predictable”.”(Penny)

Indicative of the divide is the controversy generated on the group’s mailing list when one participant expressed his reservation over members realising their “vanity projects” on the Brik platform. This refers to a member’s frustration over the booking of an obscure yet very expensive band by the programming team, which eventually did not

attract much response from the public, leading to a loss in finances. His rationale is that while it is fine to do something that interests you a few times, in the long run engaging in “vanity projects” means lack of collective responsibility for the Brik and ignores the fact that every single member *is* the Brik. He also argues:

“What you don’t want to do is have really niche programming on nights of the week where you could be making money. The weekend we make money.” (Jack)

Thus indicating that the usually quieter weekdays can be used for programming more experimental events, but the traditionally busier weekends should be reserved for events targeting a niche audience. His view provoked a strong response from other members:

“Depending on your definition of “vanity project”, I might disagree. I could perceive it being read as potentially discouraging of experimenting with ideas overall, especially to any newer volunteers unaware of the Brik history and ethos (...) I realise the remark was made in reference to not squandering the days of the week that are most likely to bring in the money (which we absolutely do need), but The Brik is a resource - or group of resources - to which we are all entitled, and I strongly believe we should also encourage each other to use it to explore ideas, do interesting projects. (...) If something may be lucrative but culturally bland, unadventurous or redundant, the damage generated to the perception of The Brik could outweigh the benefit of money generated by it - this, to me, would be significantly worse than a unique/culturally valuable event within the overall programme not generating significant money. Though of course cultural and financial worth are both important, and can both be present in the same project.”
(Max)

Max criticises a hard-nosed capitalist perspective, which would see profit as the only measurement of value, thus complying with the anti-capitalist ethos of the organisation. From a capitalist standpoint, any not-for-profit organisation might find itself labelled a “vanity project” and in this sense the Brik is in its whole a vanity project, one that

constitutes a central component of the community's status and one that members are proud of. Violating the ethos can damage that perception, threatening to reduce the community to the level of outsiders.

The creativity vs. financial stability debate extends beyond the artistic offering to the manner in which other sources of income are handled. A major point of conflict while I was volunteering at the community started when the bar team noted that bar profits were down -approximately £2000 from the year before - and suggestions on how to resolve this came to the discussion table. I should clarify that drinks are sold to the public at very low prices, allowing however for a small profit margin, while volunteers are entitled to free soft drinks and alcoholic beverages at cost price. Based on the fact that volunteers prices hadn't changed in years, however, these were likely to be below cost price and taking into account the calculation that a third of bar sales are to volunteers, a proposal was made for a system that would give members a discount of £1 off the public price for any drink, with soft drinks remaining free. Instantly this generated a number of responses against the proposal based on the rationale that the "knocking off a pound" system might result in prices that are still above cost, effectively meaning that some, however little, profit would be made off of volunteer sales, a practice deemed inappropriate. Devotees against the proposal took it to the mailing list to express their opposition:

"The Brik is not about making money. It is a 'Not FOR profit' enterprise in case anyone doesn't realise or has forgot. Interestingly at Cinema Nova, our closest cousin in mainland Europe (Brussels), there is an entrenched culture of core volunteers getting beer FREE. So much so that when I tried paying for a beer (only E1.50) I was practically wrestled to the ground and had a beer token zealously thrust upon me."
(Daniel)

Comparing the community with what is considered to be an associative group; Daniel disgraces the proposed practice and subtly discredits its supporters by suggesting they have forgotten what the nature of the community is. His tone is consistent with many members' view (particularly those in favour of faithfully following a regime) that some of the participants fail "to get" what the space is all about and thus they are threatening

the community's integrity. Those opposing the proposal also commonly state that finances are only important in supporting the group's joint enterprise of experimentation and creativity. From this standpoint, talks about "money" are only appropriate insofar as they support other causes.

"We do need to generate income - of course - but I feel that if a perception has developed that this should be a main driving force or reason for being or doing, I would see that as unfortunate, and even potentially damaging. I would say this: the income that is (absolutely) necessary needs to be considered only as a component of facilitating our independence, which enables us to do interesting, culturally valuable, things." (Account from the mailing list)

Contrary to these views, a relatively high number of appropriators were in favour of the "knocking off a pound" proposal, primarily due to its simplicity (no need to list all cost prices for all available drinks), but also due to a willingness to contribute financially to the group, especially given the benefits that are received in return:

"I personally have no problem with paying a bit more for my drinks – I consider it a privilege to be able to volunteer somewhere where we all get so much back already – food, free screenings, volunteer only events, good company, the opportunity to design and run events with no guarantee they will do well. In principle I see no problem with the Brik skimming a miniscule amount of profit off my purchases." (Billy)

Volunteers expressing a "voice of reason" also highlight the importance of the community's viability in their narratives:

"I said a fair amount about this - not because I want a bigger surplus (aka 'profit'), but because I want the Brik to continue. Circumstances/environment do not stay the same. The fact we can pay our bills today doesn't mean we will be able to forever." (Penny)

This willingness of appropriators to contribute financially to the community is rejected by devotees, not because of an opposition to the idea of helping out with the viability of the space, but due to an opposition to “profit making”, a capitalist principle that drives the operations of dissociative others. The community’s lack of formally established rules and lack of formal hierarchy further reinforces such division, by prompting those aiming to change the doxa to cite the absence of reification of the normative system to support their thesis:

“Someone suggested that we establish the principle that the Brik should not make any profit at all from volunteers. People did not need that probably, cause that isn’t written down anywhere you know. People did not read that properly and began to respond to the debate as if it WAS a fixed principle.” (Penny)

In other words, the intangible and abstract nature of the normative system allows those in favour of its alteration more ground to challenge it.

9.7 Conceptualising Taste Heterogeneity within Collectives

I earlier explained that with the passage of time, trial and error as well as repetition and multiple practices within the community eventually became established, leading to some commonly accepted norms, which significantly diminish the space of the disputable that continues to be up for debate. It is clear, however, from the divides presented in this chapter, that despite the establishment of practices, aspects of doxa are persistently challenged by some (usually, though not always, newer) members, who wish to alter it in order to accommodate their perceptions of tastefulness. The question that naturally stems from this is, what is it that is undisputed in today’s Brik community and what is the main drive behind intra-group tensions? Volunteers, despite having to deal with intense debates constantly, recognise a certain level of shared understanding amongst them that maintains their sense of belonging to the group:

“If you have an idea for something to put on, it is unlikely you will put on something that is completely and radically opposed to the rest of the

programme, people just don't seem comfortable doing that. I have never seen a volunteer come through that doesn't broadly fit in with everybody else, to an extent you know." (Neal)

"I think people have a trust to common sense and assume that certain things go without saying." (Billy)

Notionally all members believe that they are fitting in with the regime of the group. As discussed extensively in the previous chapter, this system includes all the norms that distinguish the group from its dissociative others, drawing upon the principles of bohemianism, including autonomy, radicalism and romanticism, as well as the joint enterprise of de-fetishising the arts domain. What is clear in the accounts above is that the normative system underlying the community, along with the joint enterprise(s) served by the group, are commonly accepted both by devotees and appropriators, yet not interpreted in the same manner nor followed with the same intensity. On the one hand, the common acceptance of the regime is undisputed by all, which contributes both to the continuation and survival of the group (i.e. members have enough in common to co-run the collective) and its etic perception as an "underground, alternative arts venue".

On the other hand, the diverse interpretations and the faithful (or not) following of the regime constitute sources of struggle of both sayings and doings. Where autonomy means no profit and no external funding for devotees, it also means caution in relation to finances for appropriators. Where experimentation means only non-commercial events for devotees, it does not exclude events "for pleasure" for appropriators. And where a looser structure means no bureaucracy to devotees, it is overlooked by appropriators when facilitation operations come into play.

Arsel and Bean (2013) argue that "a taste regime propagates a shared understanding of aesthetic order that shapes the ways people use objects and deploy the meanings associated with the material". Instead, this study shows that while a taste regime indeed propagates a shared understanding as to what is the appropriate way of doing things, the application of it, actualisation in doings and interpretation in meanings, differs from actor to actor. There is a system of classification in place that distinguishes what is appropriate from what is to be avoided, but its implementation is ultimately the result of

negotiations amongst members whose interpretation of it differs significantly. These authors also state that “a taste regime problematizes objects by continually questioning how they align with the regime’s core meanings”, without addressing, however, what follows when the answer to this “questioning” is informed by actors’ personal values and goals (including life history, social and cultural capital), resulting in an array of responses that are not necessarily at peace with one another.

Observations from the Brik community bear a number of similarities to the findings of de Valck (2007) in her study on e-wars occurring within online tribes. Within the community of culinary lovers described by de Valck tensions arise between “idealistic and passionate cooks”, who will never opt for ready-made products” (267) and participants who might occasionally engage in the use of ready-mades, justifying and contextualising their practice similarly to the Brik’s appropriators by focusing their narrative on the pragmatics of their life, including: busy schedules, work and children. On a similar note, Schouten and McAlexanger (1995) in their description of the various sub-groups within the Harley Davidson subculture state that “Each subgroup within the HDSC is committed to the same set of core values, but each group interprets them in a manner that is contextually consistent with the prevailing life structures (i.e. ages, occupations, family structure) of its members” (50). While in the latter case heterogeneity refers to differences amongst different groups (as opposed to within a particular collective), the principles that underlie it are not unlike what is described in this study. Taste heterogeneity can be conceptualised as differences in the interpretation of an otherwise commonly accepted regime. To rephrase this, the findings show that normative aspects commonly valued as doxa are undisputed and it is instead the actualisations of them to doings and justification through meanings by different types of followers that constitute the main cause of tensions.

9.8 Strategies for Dealing with Taste Conflicts

After it became apparent that the negotiation of heterogeneous tastes is a necessary process in the context of the collective, my focus shifted on observing how these struggles get resolved. In other words, if members share different, and occasionally

diametrically opposing views as to what is the “tasteful” way of operating and which offerings are considered to be in line with what the taste regime dictates, how are these differences dealt with and how are preferences actualised? In the Brik I found that many of these ideological and praxis struggles do not get resolved, in the sense that members do not necessarily reach consensus with regards to which of the purposes that the community serves should be prioritised nor in respect of what practices or type of offering best expresses that common purpose(s). Instead, those sharing similar views are likely to find ways of dealing with heterogeneity (without necessarily resolving it) by employing a number of strategies. Those in favour of a faithful execution of the normative system may symbolically narrow the boundaries of who they consider to be one of “us”, use the community’s structure to prevent the actualisation of tastes that they oppose, exclude others from participating in debates by exercising their increased amount of cultural capital or “turn a blind eye” to the execution of tastes that they consider inappropriate. On the other hand, those adopting a more flexible approach towards the normative system (and usually those with less power as established earlier) employ different techniques, including: physically narrowing the boundaries of “us” by engaging in sub-group activity, putting pressure through informal coalitions or compromising on some aspects of taste actualisations in order to reach an end.

9.8.1 Strategies of Devotees

Longstanding members, the majority of whom are in favour of maintaining the status quo, have been portrayed earlier in my accounts as often frustrated with newer participants who are perceived to lack comprehension about the community’s enterprise. In the words of one of them:

“We are having this sort of transitory workforce, who aren’t necessarily understanding the kind of history and ethos. Then they cannot just come in and think “this is how you do a job” and just do that job and be fairly unthinking.” (Max)

From this standpoint, those not “fitting in” with the existing regime are perceived to be a “transitory workforce” as opposed to those constituting “true” members of the group.

This “symbolic distinction” was, explicitly or implicitly, expressed to me by multiple devotees with a longstanding service. A distinction that started off as a realistic representation regarding the high turnover of volunteers (indeed there is a transitory workforce comprising those who volunteer on few occasions, never to return again and who offer their labour to the group without necessarily being understanding, on board or even “fussed” about its ideals) is also occasionally used to describe, and portray as inferior, active members of a different ideology (appropriators). In this case, paraphrasing Wenger (1998), the boundaries of the organisation do not necessarily coincide with the boundaries of the community, meaning that the number of people offering their labour in the organisation is not necessarily the same as what is perceived to form the “community”. On a similar note, de Valck (2007) argues that in-group and out-group boundaries not only occur between the community and dissociative others, but may also concern core members who set themselves apart *within* the group. By narrowing the boundaries of “us” in this symbolic manner, the faithful followers of the regime are able to distinguish themselves from “destructive” members, preserve their joint enterprise and dismiss any need for doxa adaptations.

Following from this, core members are likely to “turn a blind eye” in those cases when the tastes of the perceived “transitory workforce” get actualised. While taste divides lead to intense debates, whether private or public during the meetings or in the mailing lists, once the perceived “inappropriate” ideas take place (e.g. the showcase of a commercial film), core members are likely to overlook the event rather than consume energy criticising it – in the words of one of them referring to the showcase of the King’s Speech: “this never happened for me”. My observations confirm that despite the intense division concerning decision making of any kind (operations, offering etc), once these took place, opposing members protected their perception of the regime by negating the idea that a breach had taken place. Following from this, their *illusio* (Bourdieu 1996 (1992), 228), or belief that “the game is worth playing” is maintained intact.

While “narrowing the boundaries of us” and “turning a blind eye” are useful in dealing with the actualisation of inappropriate tastes and help the members that employ them to maintain their *illusio*, they still do nothing for aiding them to prevent the tastes of others from getting actualised or for their preferences to dominate during negotiations. To

achieve the first, core members are likely to rely on the Brik's long established structure and informal rules. In other words, the "consensus" principle that I described in the methodology chapter can be used to prevent decisions being made, even if it is only a small minority that leads the opposition. Rejection of the voting principle (one man, one vote and the majority defines what decisions are being made) and its replacement by a consensus systems on the basis of the idea that a "majority cannot impose its taste on the minority", constitutes a part of the Brik's doxa that, perhaps surprisingly, has not been doubted by members. The principle, however, on most occasions seems to work in favour of longstanding volunteers, in other words, those expressing the most intense distaste against ougroup tastes and who are more likely to turn down a proposal for an event or an alteration to the existing processes of running the venue. As such, while the resistance for the transferring of the rota was only driven by a couple of individuals, the debate stayed in the "discussion table" for years as implementation would not have been possible without the acceptance of all. From this standpoint, the community's structure that allows each member to have an "equal no" is used by devotees to maintain the doxa.

Perhaps the greatest resource available to longstanding members, used to influence and dominate taste making actively, is their increased cultural capital, earned due to their affiliation with the arts field, and authority, partly earned due to their longstanding status. Exercising their intellectual resources, these members enter negotiations and defend their tastes in manners that are in some ways incomprehensible to those not possessing subcultural capital, for: vocabulary, assertion of arguments, articulation of the ideological underpinnings of the regime that they perceive is governing practice and writing tone, often prove to be unfamiliar ground for newer volunteers. One of them recalls:

"There was this big thing that kicked off on the emails list where two people were in a fight with each other. I remember thinking that was very interesting, one part of the thing was sending out all those emails that were kind of dissing the other person but it was all sort of done like performance art. it was not just like slammering, it was a bit like reading newspaper articles which was quite weird because I actually read it and

thought it was part of the Evening Post and that someone had written about it and what was going on... It was quite surreal!" (Billy)

In his account, Billy describes how he mistook the email exchange on the mailing list, which in fact constituted a debate amongst members, as the description of an event by a newspaper article. He compares the exchange of opinions to performance art, to which he could only remain a silent observer, lacking capacity to express an opinion as "an equal". Similarly he describes how participation in such intense debates is difficult for newer members who run the risk of being humiliated by the more powerful ones:

"I have been in meetings and seen emails going around, which is probably worse because everyone sees the emails, and it is a bit more humiliating, or perhaps not humiliating but if it was me I would feel a lot worse for something that everyone is going to read as opposed to like few people in office space where you can kind of argue about it and is not going to be minuted or sent out to everyone. So I see a bit of that going on." (Billy)

Billy's impression that other members share the same "fear" of contributing to debates against the more powerful members is confirmed by Lisa. In her account she describes how with her proposal for a "horror movie night" she was faced with a dismissive attitude that branded her idea as "a whim":

"I was quite embarrassed that I had been humiliated on the whole mailing list which is something that I think a lot of people are quite shy about. Kind of sending an email out and getting very negative feedback." (Lisa)

In sum, older members often use the authority they have earned through participation and the cultural capital they possess to "impose" their tastes on the group, excluding to some extent those unable to join in the debate, either due to lack of knowledge or fear of humiliation.

9.8.2 Strategies of Appropriators

Similarly to what has been observed with devotees, appropriators often employ strategies that narrow the boundaries of who is considered to be “one of us” in order to actualise their tastes within the Brik context. In contrast to that described earlier, due to their anemic influential power, these members are unable to exclude devotees symbolically – especially since the latter indisputably constitute the “core”, the foundation of the community’ existence -, they do however engage in sub-group activities that allow them to practice “safely” their tastes within the boundaries of a smaller group. Two groups of this kind were initiated while I was volunteering at the community: the film-making and the podcast initiatives. The purpose of the first is to allow volunteers to engage in the production of short films. There is no specific purpose that these films serve and no particular agenda that they follow. Rather, in line with those volunteers who prioritise hedonism and pleasure, the themes of the films are generated out of members’ passion for a particular genre and their quest to “have a good time” while doing something creative.

While interviewing Billy, the initiator of the film making group, he explains with profound satisfaction that there are no specific skills required in order to participate and that people in the group don’t have any prior particular experience. In fact, this was a point that was constantly highlighted in the emails sent out that aimed to motivate people to participate in the initiative. Taking an evangelising approach, these emails encouraged members to come along to brainstorming meetings and amateur filming sessions, just bringing their ideas and enthusiasm. Billy explains to me why it is important to encourage those with fewer skills to participate:

“I guess it comes from feeling intimidated by being around people who sort of think really interestingly and have really interesting backgrounds. There is lots of people who are involved with the place or have been in the past and have all these interesting connections through things in the entertainment industry. And I have kind of always found that kind of... I don’t think intimidating is the right word but kind of humbling. But at the same time there are a lot of people who kind of don’t have any of that, they kind of just turn up cause they are interested in film or music.

And they like the stuff that goes on but they are not necessarily that competent themselves. And I just thought, I guess cause that strikes the cord with me, I wanted to give people the opportunity to have a go I guess. And I guess if no one else there is talented it doesn't make me look bad (laughs). I feel more comfortable in what I am doing, what I am contributing to it. So there is my selfish angle on it." (Billy)

As such, the group provides a safe platform for members lacking in social and/or cultural capital to express their tastes without the fear of being criticised or living in the shadow of those with high cultural capital who faithfully follow the regime. Discussions in the film-making group mailing list stand in sharp contrast to those in relation to the programming list (where devotees also participate, explicitly expressing their opposition to anything they deem non appropriate). Members encourage one another, responding with positive and welcoming comments to any idea or suggestion, for "This is awesome", "it fits perfectly", "good stuff", are phrases that often appear in the emails. There is a shared understanding that the group's purpose is "to have fun" and that the approach followed is one of motivation and reassurance. Some devotees "kept an eye" on the group by participating on the mailing list, but showed no interest in attending meetings or participating in the generation of content, effectively allowing the group to operate in any manner they chose.

On one occasion I went along with the group to film a spoof of a commercial multiplex's membership card promotion video. The original video displays a group of confident friends having fun, promoting the slogan "be an insider" to a world of glamour by getting a membership card. We filmed a similar video where the actions and gestures of the original actors were repeated in an exaggerated fashion, ridiculing the original piece, while the appearance and fashion sense of the people in the Brik video, purposefully shabby, further contributed to the mocking of the original piece. Similarly to that explained earlier, this is an example demonstrating the common understanding of all members as to where the group stands in relation to a competing "them" (in this case the commercial multiplex). However, while this is a view shared by all, its actualisation through a parody performance would constitute a point of criticism for devotees, who believe that making a difference should be executed via experimentation, rather than by

mocking outsiders. On other occasions, the group would engage in the filming of short horror films, a genre of common interest amongst members.

Similarly, the podcasting group was created for members to discuss cultural issues that concern them (e.g. the release of a new film, a review of the forthcoming programming in the Brik, a commentary of a particular show on offer) without regulations being imposed by members of the core. As Billy suggests in his account, the group is able to express themselves about films and performances that they like, without necessarily being competent in doing it and without the fear of being looked down upon, or worse, humiliated by others.

On another note, when appropriators want to actualise a taste of theirs within the “conventional” boundaries of the community, they might compromise as a means of reaching their end. An example of this is to be found in the “comedy combo” nights that were extensively reviewed in chapter 8. Born out of some volunteers’ passion for showing classic comedy films from Hollywood’s golden era, these tastes are only accepted by the community as long as an appropriate justification can be negotiated for inclusion in the program. However, the resignification of those films from a “predictable oldie” to a “comedy combo night”, is seen as “means for achieving an end” by appropriators. More specifically, while discussing the matter with Penny, she explained to me that the resignification of the event is not necessary occurring to attract audiences:

“I have been showing 30s and 40s comedies and have been getting good audiences for those, people who come specifically to see the film rather than the stand up.” (Penny)

And subsequently explains the reason why, even though the comedy films should have been sufficient for inclusion in the programme as film-only nights, she accepted the addition of the “stand-up comedy” element:

“The comedy combo, I’ve got it. Me and other people suggested a film. Some people said it is not very exciting; you need to add something to it, there needs to be something extra about it. So I thought all right then,

let me show some comedies and my extra will be stand up. And so now I have booked films for the comedy combo, I don't consult anybody about it, I just programme what I want to programme. And that's it. But that's you know, kind of a way for me of getting something that I want on the big screen. And people they haven't realised yet that people are doing that. So for example there was going to be a Spanish night with dancers and dancing and singing. This was a way for somebody who was interested to show a Pedro Almodovar film. That was their motivation. They wanted to show women on the verge of a nervous breakdown and to do that, they turned it into an event. See what I mean?" (Penny)

Penny's perception of the resignification of the comedy combo event is perceived in a very different way to that of devotees. For her, the showcasing of the comedy is happening *despite* having to do it as part of an event. By contrast, devotees perceive this as taking control over the meaning of the film and altering the negative connotations generated from the manner in which it is embraced by dissociative others. Similarly, resignifying events in order to actualise tastes in spite of having to do what is perceived to be a compromise, is a relatively common strategy amongst the less powerful members that allows them to achieve their desired end while at the same time satisfying the objections of the core.

Lastly, another strategy used by periphery members when dealing with the "consensus principle" is that of forming informal majorities. While, as it has been explained earlier, the voting principle is rejected by the group - and in fact devotees use this policy in their favour by vetoing any taste deemed inappropriate -, appropriators are still likely to try and actualise tastes that are under dispute by forming coalitions. One of them, referring to the bar pricing debate brought up earlier, explains:

"We kind of had this deadlock. So then we had a meeting. So basically before the meeting I had a long conversation with 20 to 30 people to make sure that when we had that meeting it wasn't just three people, it was 20 people. So I had to use old school labour party politics. But it

was only when they were faced by 20 people bombarding them with questions that they finally gave in on that particular point.” (Jake)

And in another similar case:

“With the online rota, I said let’s see what other people think. And they said "so you are throwing down the gauntlet?". So I said yes I am. I am throwing down the gauntlet. And you know, we got in agreement to trial it. From the next layer out, the 20 to 30 core not the two to three core.” (Johnny)

In both these examples, appropriators, aware of the weaker position in which they all are individually, form informal majorities with the goal of putting pressure on the fewer, yet more powerful, devotees. From this standpoint, the community’s “consensus” principle is deemed inadequate in the governing of the group, as it prevents the reversion of dominant practices that appropriators consider to be flawed or destructive to the group’s survival.

9.9 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the negotiation of heterogeneous tastes amongst members of the collective, placing the emphasis on the internal dynamics of taste making. It has been argued that taste heterogeneity is to be traced in the evolution of the community from a closely knit group of friends to a much wider group that accommodates people from highly diverse backgrounds. More specifically, heterogeneity has been attributed to the different perceptions of members as to what purpose the community is there to serve as well as on their different motivations for joining the group. The chapter has subsequently provided a novel classification of participants, including: devotees (those who religiously comply to the community’s normative system), appropriators (those who whilst believing in the same norms interpret them by taking into account their personal needs as well as pragmatic issues related to the group’s survival) and marginals. The ideological struggles occurring amongst the different types of members have been taken into account and a detailed overview provided regarding the prevailing

themes in tensions concerning the actualisation of tastes, these being: bureaucracy vs. facilitation of operations, experimentation vs. hedonism and financial security vs. creativity. Finally, the chapter has provided an overview of the various strategies that members of a different standing employ in order to cope with taste conflicts. For devotees, these strategies are: symbolically narrowing the boundaries of who they consider to be one of “us”, use of the community’s structure to prevent the actualisation of tastes that they oppose, excluding others from participating in debates by exercising their increased amount of cultural capital and “turning a blind eye” to the execution of tastes that they consider inappropriate. For appropriators on the other hand, these strategies are: physically narrowing the boundaries of “us” by engaging in sub-group activity, putting pressure through informal coalitions and compromising on some aspects of taste actualisations as a means to reaching their end.

10. Discussion

10.1 Overview of Theoretical Framework

This thesis was set out with three aims: First to contribute to our understanding of how communities of practice maintain the boundaries that distinguish them from dissociative others; second, to analyse the processes of appropriation through which distaste is used to endow meaning to practices of such communities; and third, to contribute to our understanding of intra-group heterogeneity, with particular focus on taste negotiations amongst members. The theoretical significance of these aims is to be found in the idea that consumption collectives are engaging in increasingly diversified and skilful ways of achieving distinction in fields where the market has tainted the possible alternatives. From this standpoint, taste-making is a complex process that takes into account the relevant status positions of actors within a field and entails intra-group negotiations with regards to what is the most appropriate way of symbolically demarcating the community from “them”. The methodological approach of ethnography was chosen as the most suitable method in relation to achieving those aims and an “alternative” arts cooperative was selected as an appropriate context, due both to the intensity of taste wars within the domain of the arts, generated from passionate attachment of social groups to different genres, movements and styles expressions, as well as due to the anti-establishment nature of the community that renders expressions of (dis)taste to be of grave importance.

In chapter 2 I presented an overview of theories of taste formation, with particular emphasis on the work of Bourdieu (1984), and most importantly on taste as a classification mechanism that has the ability to demarcate symbolically collectives of different status. I subsequently (chapter 3) offered insights into contemporary, critical reconceptualization of the construct. These approaches redirected the focus of the study from the role of object of consumption in achieving social distinction, to (a) the symbolic interpretation of the manner of consuming and the contested meaning of practices (Holt 1998), (b) the actualisation and continual achievement of taste in “doings” that include the body and mind (Hennion 2001; 2004; 2007) and (c) the “recognizable and repeatable patterns” in one’s consumption choices which are

orchestrated by a particular taste regime (Arsel and Bean 2013, 902). Recognising that rejection is more determining in drawing social distinctions (Bourdieu 1984; Wilk 1997), I subsequently explored the role of taste's negative counterpart in the drawing of boundaries of an "us versus them" fashion (chapter 4). Consumer research works exploring the use of reference groups in the formation of tastes and distastes (Hogg 1998; Hogg and Banister 2001; Banister and Hogg 2004; Escalas and Bettman 2005; White and Dahl 2007) were criticised for treating the construct as static when exploring reference group influence, thus failing to account for nuanced symbolic distinctions that are not solely based on differentiation of object of consumption. Chapter 5 subsequently clarified the importance of researching at the micro-social level, based on the principle that the meaning of market offerings is socially constituted and only significant when it exists as shared social knowledge within cultural groups (Berger and Luckmann 1967). A gap in the literature was then traced by suggesting that despite taste being an important aspect of consumer culture, the holistic outlook of the taste-making process has remained relatively underresearched. In addition to this and in line with Chalmers et al. (2013, 2011), the chapter criticised the idea that most studies on marketplace cultures have treated (either explicitly or implicitly) collective tastes as unified wholes that stand in opposition to the tastes of dissociative others, leaving the importance of intra-group dynamics in the process of taste-making underexplored. Finally, communities of practice have been justified as a well suited unit of analysis due to the need to focus on the social relations amongst members (Goulding et al. 2013). Tracing a relationship between communities of practice and taste formation, Gherardi (2009) argues that passionate attachment of a community to its object of practice is the basis of taste-making, and entails the constant negotiation of practices that are appraised, contested, and refined until deemed to be "fitting" the group, and thus acceptable (taste), or deemed unsuitable and thus rejected (distaste).

10.2 Identifying the Gap in the Literature

Accordingly, the theoretical background of the project dictates that taste-making in communities of practice is the outcome of two sets of dynamics: (a) the positioning of the community in the social space in relation to outgroups in an us versus them fashion (inter-group driven) and (b) intra-group negotiations as to what constitutes "appropriate

taste” driven by the inevitably heterogeneous nature of social groups. This means that collective taste is not only, as Bourdieu (1984), Wilk (1994, 1997) and Hogg (1998) suggest, relational to the tastes of others, but also dependent upon the different perceptions that members have of ‘tastefulness’. In attempting to frame taste making based on these dynamics, however, a number of gaps in the existing literature emerge. First, looking at the role of external reference groups, previous studies have portrayed ingroup taste as a mere binary opposite to the tastes of dissociative others (i.e. Hogg 1998; Hogg and Banister 2001; Banister and Hogg 2004; Escalas and Bettman 2005; White and Dahl 2007), essentially grounding rejection behaviour in static models. These studies also fail to provide a framework of understanding as to who constitutes a dissociative other and as such how are the coordinates for what constitutes distaste emerging. While we know that groups located closer in the social space are more likely to be in competition with one another (Bourdieu 1984), it is not clear how the variant status of such aversion groups affects the ingroup’s taste making, or how the ingroup’s affiliation with more than one domain might increase the complexities of boundary making. Second, as it has already been mentioned, we currently know very little about the impact of intra-group dynamics in the negotiation of collective taste. While intra-group heterogeneity is widely acknowledged outside the marketplace cultures literature (for example, in the fields of organisation studies, sociology and education), it has remained relatively underresearched within the realm of consumer culture (with the exception of Chalmers et al. 2013; de Valck 2007) and completely neglected in relation to collective taste-making. Lastly, the holistic outlook of how the identified dynamics interact together to provide the basis for taste-making remains unknown and constitutes the main contribution that this study is aiming to make.

10.3 Inter-Group Dynamics of Taste-Making

10.3.1 Maintaining Symbolic Boundaries from “Them”

Communities of practice use the tastes of dissociative others as the basis for the formation of their own tastes, with the ultimate goal of achieving distinction. From this standpoint and as Hennion (2004, 135) puts it, taste “starts with the comparison with others' tastes”, because dissociative actors provide the co-ordinates and navigational

cues as to what it is that needs to be avoided (Ogilvie 1987). Not unlike what Bourdieu (1984) argues, the findings showed that the distinctive value of the ingroup's taste is established *relationally* to judgements of taste exhibited by avoidance groups as well as to the conditions that lead to their actualisation. The community develops its sense of we-ness (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001) by complying with a normative system that demarcates the ingroup from its dissociative others. In line with one of the four disgust-based strategies used by groups to gain symbolic distinction as identified by Wilk (1997), the ingroup has a subtle shared understanding that the normative system governing their practice would not be tolerated by avoidance communities (Douglas 1996), creating a "we love what they hate" sentiment of group sovereignty. In this way, the community embraces tastes with radical and romantic connotations and engages in autonomous and de-fetishised practices in order to show their dissimilarity to outgroups in general (Escalas and Bettman 2005), but especially to those they wish to dissociate from (White and Dahl 2007). As such, the findings confirm that an "undesired end state" (Hogg and Banister 2001) is helping the community define its position in the social space.

As Hogg et al. (2008, 154) point out, "very little extant research focuses on the reciprocity of the relationship between positive and negative poles". The findings reveal how the constant interplay between the favourable and that which causes disgust is used to legitimise ingroup practice. What would usually be perceived as a community "inadequacy" (e.g. last minute cancellation or change of event, a cold environment, and inadequate service) is overturned to a "tasteful" and human way of doing things by meticulously using a de-fetishisation narrative that criticises the "picture perfect" yet robotic and dependent "ways of them" and condemning the commodification of entertainment by outgroups. Similarly to what Douglas (1996) argues, the chosen way of doing things together (i.e. allowing for mistakes to happen and embracing potential inadequacies as a sign of humanity) is praised, because it would be looked down upon by dissociative others and as such, hostility is implicit in its appraisal. By using that which causes disgust as an (external) negative reference point, the community favours its own practices by challenging their dominant meaning, even in cases when the practice in question has taken-for-granted-negative associations. In this case the community reverts to the original negative meaning of a certain way of doing things to positive, by uncovering the masked negativity of outgroup practices marketed by "them". The

interplay between taste and distaste ultimately aims to strengthen the distinction of the community, by providing external supporting evidence to the superiority of ingroup practices that would otherwise be too difficult to dissimulate as ‘tasteful’. The ability of members who possess the necessary code (field-related capital) to untangle and comprehend these meaning subversions is enhancing their participation experience and contributes to their feeling of distinction from the massified market.

Discussion over the “tasteful way of doing things” leads to another important point. The findings show that it is not only the offering of the group that is subject to juxtaposition, but of equal importance is the community’s management of practice as yet another way to maintain symbolic boundaries. In studying taste, Hennion (2001) prioritises the actualisation process, over that of the object of taste or its properties, but given that the selected context in this project is a collective (and at the same time an organisation as opposed to Hennion’s individual level) allows for a much wider interpretation of just what that actualisation might entail. In other words, aside from the object of practice of the community (the showcasing of art) and the manner in which this is carried out, the working practices of the group, including the management and running of the community, are also part of the performance of taste. Most importantly, the rationale behind both the particular choices for the object of practice (what type of offering should we have?) as well as for ways of running the group (including finance management, information technology in place, organisational structure and extended product offering including the bar) are based on justifications that have aesthetic properties.

While the blurring of the boundaries between consumption and production has been established by numerous authors (e.g. Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Humphrey and Grayson 2008; Giesler 2006), taste has been extensively looked at from a consumption practice point of view within the consumer research literature, while little or no focus has been put on how modes of production in communities also play a crucial role in symbolic distinctions. More specifically, many previous studies have emphasised the manner of consuming as a way of gaining distinction (including Holt 1998; Hennion 2001, 2003, 2007; Arsel and Thompson 2010; Arsel and Bean 2013). The presumption nature of the context of enquiry in this study, however, demonstrates that manner of production is just as important in the distinction game and can assert this in subtle

manners that are difficult to be “copied” by outsiders. The aesthetic reading of organisational life and the aesthetics of management practice have been previously studied by Strati (1992; 1999; 2008; 2009) in the field of organisational studies, while Witz et al. (2003) refer to “aesthetic labour” to show how workers mobilize their aesthetic dispositions towards producing a particular “style” of service encounter. The management of practice may come as a surprise when thinking about matters of taste (for example one may wonder how the pricing strategy of the community or its funding policy may be considered for their aesthetic properties), yet many unconventional practices can be thought of in terms of their “tastefulness”. Strati (2008) for example, explains how mathematicians describe their objects of knowledge in aesthetic terms, noting that it is often very difficult to determine whether or not ‘beautiful’ is being used as a synonym for ‘good’, or vice versa (Gherardi 2009). This “wider” consideration of practices as tasteful or distasteful (meaning here that the management of practice would not traditionally be considered for its aesthetic properties) is allowing consumers to enforce distinctions in novel and more complex ways, which are strengthening their social status and are largely inaccessible to/unachievable for outsiders (i.e. any cinema can showcase an indie film but very few can claim that they achieve this by being fully autonomous or volunteer run).

Aside from offering an additional dimension to our understanding of taste, the management of practice is eventually able to alter the meaning of the main object of it as well. In the project, this becomes obvious in cases when the same film embraced by the community is also showcased by a dissociative other, yet the status of it is superior when in the context of the ingroup, because of the symbolic value infused to it through coproductive practices that led to its actualisation (Schau et al. 2009). As such, the study demonstrates that it is not only the main offering, but also the working practices of the community that are appraised, contested, and constantly refined in order to ensure that the ingroup’s “way of doing things” condemns that of outgroups as absurd and makes a practical demonstration of the emptiness of the values and powers that “they” pursue.

The findings in relation to boundary-making also bring to the forefront the potential influence of economic resources in the process of proclaiming distinction. As discussed in chapter 7, given the community’s restricted financial resources and occasionally limited human capital, the extent to which a de-fetishisation narrative is part of the

normative system independently of lack of these resources is questionable. Stepping on an existing discourse on fetishisation of products and the commodification of entertainment in particular (Adorno and Horkheimer [1944] 1972), members achieve the legitimisation and resignification of their distinct lack of resources by socially externalising “them” and their robotic, near-perfect ways, which prevent the development of independent individuals being able to judge for themselves (Adorno and Rabinbach 1975). The study suggests that the pragmatics of presumption when looking at taste as the normative system that drives practice (Arsel and Bean 2013) should not be neglected. In fact, Bourdieu (1984) puts forward a similar argument in describing how artists and intellectuals (with high cultural but low economic capital), unable to use the latter to differentiate themselves, engage in processes of subversion and appropriation, that usually aim to “shock” the bourgeoisie by denying them access to this particular way of “reading” or understanding the meaning of cultural products. When it comes to maintaining symbolic boundaries, inability to do so via economic means is likely to increase the subtlety of meaning subversions as a way of proclaiming distinction. However, the interplay between the amount of resources available and the formation of a normative system that legitimises their absence remains to be explored in more detail.

The question that naturally stems next in the discussion of boundary-making is boundaries from whom? The literature has so far focused on inter-group competition amongst social groups within particular fields of operation (Bourdieu 1984; Berger and Heath 2007; Arsel and Thompson 2010 etc). The study, however, shows that the dissimilar others who are used as focal points in taste negotiations are not strictly located within the main domain that the community’s object of practice stems from. In the findings, aside from the obvious field of the arts, and art venues, communities and audiences located within it, the ingroup is also observed drawing boundaries from other workers cooperatives, as well as from society as a whole and dominant economic systems in particular, placing an emphasis on its organisational structure and management of practice rather than its object of practice. In the respondents’ narratives, it also becomes obvious that members transcend field boundaries depending on which aspect of their normative system they wish to proclaim the sovereignty of. The reason why previous studies have focused on status competitions within particular fields of competition is to be traced in the affinity of cultural capital to specific fields. In other

words, “it is the institutional logic particular to a consumption field located in a particular socio-historical setting that invests objects and activities with cultural capital” (Holt 1997, 99). This means that expressions of cultural capital exist as field related capital, which only has value within the particular field in question (e.g. an individual not interested in wristwatches is unlikely to appreciate another’s knowledge of fine craftsmanship). The findings do not dispute this framing since the fields of competition that the community transcends (namely the arts, the worker cooperative movement and society as a whole, if we accept society as an integrative all-encompassing field) are all domains that the community is active in. What this study adds to our knowledge is the idea that aside from a collective’s main domain of operation, potential secondary fields with which the group is affiliated, can play a significant and supporting role when proclaiming distinction. Transcending amongst these fields, the community further strengthens its social position, by providing “additional evidence” of sovereignty.

10.3.2 The Use of Distaste in the Appropriation of Ingroup Practices

The findings begin to mark out the appropriation processes through which members employ distaste to resignify and internalise meaning to their practices (a) by exhibiting tastes of outsiders if they can successfully negotiate their intent, (b) by negating tastes that are prevalent in the field in order to criticise subtly outgroup practices and (c) by negotiating the ‘tastefulness’ of objects that are not valued for their aesthetics by outsiders in order to provoke.

Looking more closely at the first process and taking into account the occasional encompassing of practices that are clearly related to dissociative groups by the ingroup, while “them” and the negative end state (Ogilvie 1987; Hogg and Banister 2001; Hogg et al. 2009) is a focal point in understanding the community’s distinction, it is unable to provide the coordinates for what should be avoided. Instead, collective (dis)taste is a dynamic process of appropriation that is situated in practice and as such, the emphasis should be on its “making”. The findings extend previous claims that ingroup members engage in anti-choice (i.e. avoidance, abandonment and aversion behaviour) (Hogg 1998; Escalas and Bettman 2005; White and Dhal 2007; Berger and Heath 2008; Hogg et al. 2009) to achieve distinction. Not unlike Holt (1998) and Arsel and Thompson

(2010) the study demonstrates that the manner of prosumption has more explanatory power over the object of consumption in describing how members are able to encompass tastes of outsiders without jettisoning their normative system. Nuanced symbolic distinctions are to be found in the appropriation of practices that, even though at a first glance may seem ill-suited, carry meanings detrimental to outgroups. As Heidegger (1999) argues, essence, or the attributes that make an entity what it fundamentally is and give character to it, can only be transferred to things through appropriation. In this study, the transferability of essence, or resignification of the exocultural practice, is achieved by negotiating how the practice in question can become “proper to this particular context” (Boon 2007) through a change in the use of the object of practice and the construction of a sufficient justification for its inclusion.

The second process of appropriation recognised in the findings, begins to mark the conditions under which anti-choice is conspicuous, by taking into account Arsel and Bean’s (2013) approach on the importance of the regime that drives practice. The findings demonstrate that non-appearance of an item in a particular context is only meaningful insofar as it is one that has powerful associations with the field within which the collective operates (and as such the ingroup is expected to encompass it). Anti-choice in this case may be out of the norm according to the dominant normative system of the field, but the manner in which the item is consumed by dissociative groups is in conflict with the ingroup’s common purpose or regime. In this case, it is non-appearance that carries meanings detrimental to outgroups. By removing the field-dominant practice, the community is able to appropriate its object of practice (i.e. showcasing art) by removing its commercialised, commodified nature created by “them” and altering its essence to an experience that aims to “open up mindsets” and claiming it as the group’s “own” (Boon 2007). In other words, changing the cinema experience’s form (by removing certain items) at the same time ensures a change in the experience’s function.

The final appropriation process demonstrates how even mundane product categories, used by the entirety of groups within a particular field out of necessity and for their utilitarian purposes that they serve, can be used in the actualisation of “us and them” tensions. Similarly to what Bourdieu argues (1984), there is no area of practice where aestheticization of life cannot take place and in fact it is particularly challenging and

rewarding to be able to apply aesthetics to the most commodified, every day practices. Subtly expressing contemptuousness against dissociative others through the use of mundane product categories makes distinctions harder to trace, as to understand the meanings of such practices one needs to be in possession of the necessary “code”, or subcultural capital (Bourdieu 1984; Holt 1997; Arsel and Thompson 2010). Ingroup members gain pride through the sharing of a common understanding about a practice that seems enigmatic to outsiders.

The distaste-driven processes of appropriation demonstrated by this study: changes in the use of items and intent of practice, alterations in form to enforce changes in function and changes in the aesthetic status of commodities, all need to be collectively understood in order to acquire power and validity. These processes constitute skilful ways of achieving distinction because they presuppose the ability of members to manipulate the metaphysical function (i.e. meaning, use) of physical forms (e.g. films, pop-corn, coca-cola, IT-server). As Ostergaard et al. (1999) demonstrate, appropriation contributes to the feeling of “our” way of doing it, while the products involved in the process are transformed into a proper reflection of their owners and, in the case of this study, into a critique against those who define the ingroup’s distinction.

10.4 Inter-Group Dynamics of Taste-Making

10.4.1 Reconciling Inter-Group and Intra Group Dynamics of Taste

As illustrated in figure 6, the linking ring between externally (inter-group) driven dynamics of taste, in other words those dynamics generated by the social positioning of the community to the external and often competitive “them”, is to be found in the manner in which “us versus them” juxtapositions provide the foundation both for the formation of the community’s doxa as well as for intra-group struggles. Arsel and Bean (2013) argue that taste as a practice is regulated by discursive regimes and that myths are used to script status consumption practices. Similarly, the findings in this study demonstrate that the community’s practices are directed by a particular normative system, one that is formulated by the boundaries that the group maintains with dissociative actors. The group has defined itself in opposition to the dominant consumer

culture, a relatively commonly observed phenomenon (Dobscha 1998), by relying on a Bohemianism inspired ideology and de-fetishisation narrative that demarcates the ingroup from the commercial and increasingly co-opted by the market actors within the domain of the arts, “impure” worker cooperatives and corrupted societal economic systems. In communities of practice terms, these symbolic juxtapositions are the basis of the group’s joint enterprise. They do not simply constitute a stated goal, i.e. to decommodify entertainment, but are defined by the very process of pursuing them (for example, by negotiating the potential appropriation of practices) and they create amongst participants “relations of mutual accountability that become an integral part of the practice” (Wenger 1998, 78). The mutual accountability that members feel towards their normative system constitutes the community’s doxa. The community’s tastes are relational precisely because its normative system, joint enterprise and ultimately doxa are also relational to those that the group expresses disgust towards. It is the common acceptance of this relational normative system that creates an etic perception of the community as a unified, homogenous whole that stands in opposition to external actors and systems, because it constitutes “not only the group’s representation of the world but the group itself, which orders itself in accordance with this representation” (Bourdieu [1977] 2002, 163). In other words, members share a common understanding with regards to the social space they are in and their group’s position within it.

The integrative figure proposes that while collectives understand their group relationally, in other words by notionally complying to a normative system that is comparable to and juxtaposed to that of outgroups, taste-making can only be understood by examining just *how* a joint enterprise is negotiated amongst members. Taking into account the inevitably heterogeneous nature of communities, the participants have different perceptions with regards to what is the most appropriate way of achieving distinction. The study attributes such discrepancies of opinion to members diverging interpretations of the normative system, suggesting that different members are valuing their experience of being part of the community in varying terms and seek to actualise tastes which might not be in accordance with everyone in the group.

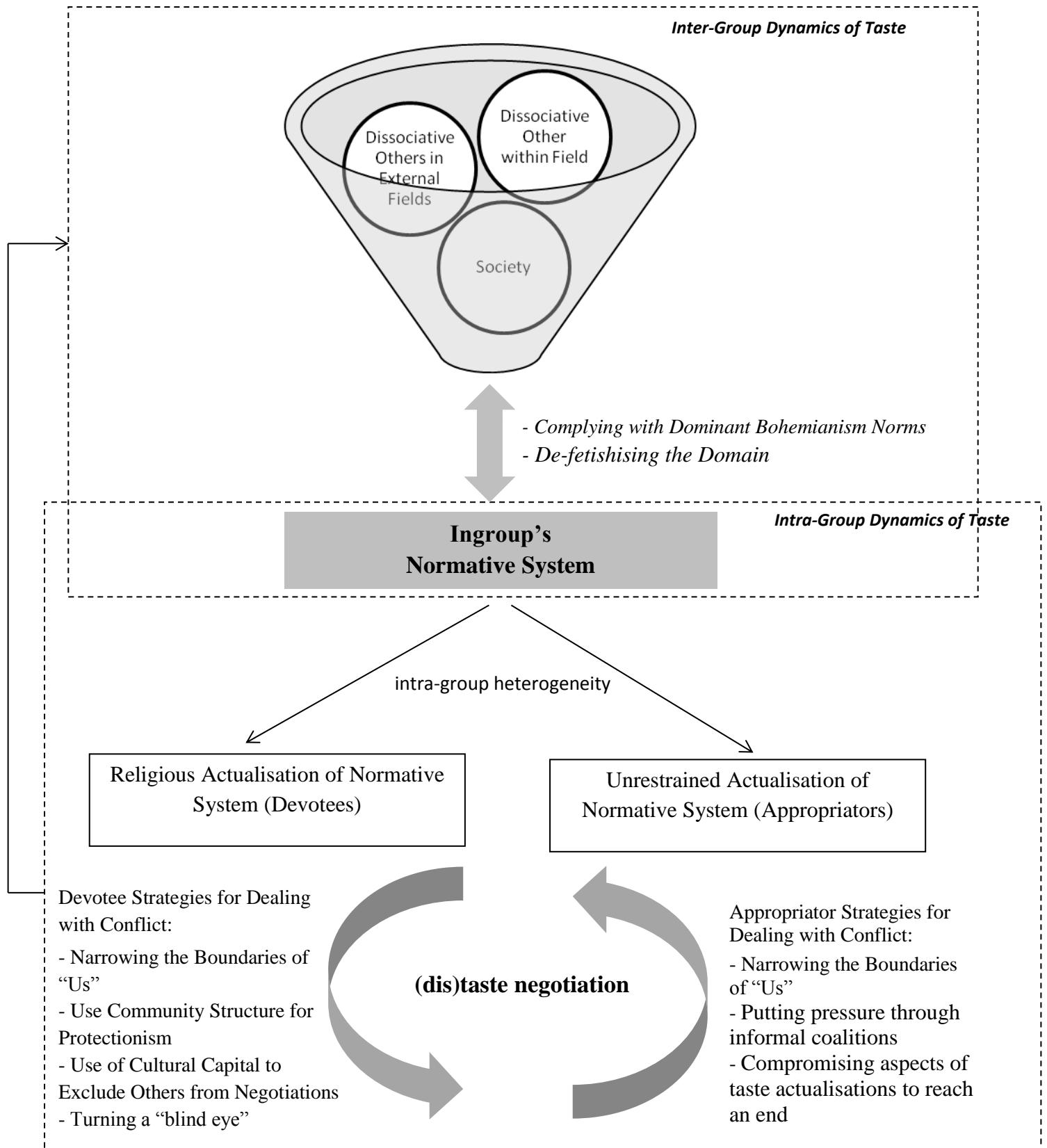


Figure 6: Integrative Framework of Taste-Making

10.4.2 Heterodoxy and Member Classification

Intra-group struggle commences when the actualisation of this normative system to doings comes into play. The normative aspects of the community's oppositional identity go without saying for all members (precisely the role of doxa as described by Bourdieu [1977] 2002), but perceptions as to how this normative system is best actualised in "doings" vary significantly amongst participants. In other words, while the regime that drives practice is shared as common knowledge amongst all as "that in which we believe in", views with regards to the implementation of these beliefs constitutes a matter of struggle. Heterodoxy with regards to the implementation of doxa is due to differences in individuals' amount of possessed social and field related capital, as well as due to discrepancies in background (primarily occupation) and in the reasons for joining the community. The contribution of these factors to group heterogeneity does not come as a surprise. Cultural and social capital have been extensively examined for how they influence one's consumption choices as well as manner of consuming (for example, Bourdieu 1984; Holt 1997, 1998; Allen 2002; Henry 2005; Arsel and Thompson 2010), while the contributing role of different motivations for joining a community to heterodoxy has been previously identified by Chalmers et al. (2013) as well as Beverland et al. (2010).

Similarly to Arsel and Bean (2013, 907), the study showed that "a taste regime problematizes objects by continually questioning how they align with the regime's core meanings". Community members were found to problematize constantly as to how their choices for particular objects of art, as well as ways of managing the community, are effectively signalling the group's oppositional relationship to dissociative others. In addition to this, however, it was found that members do not necessarily come to an agreement as to what is the best way to align their practice to the followed normative system. The discrepancy amongst the views on the best way to implement the regime is attributed to the different levels of cultural and symbolic resources amongst members, with those possessing higher amounts (and as such have expertise in the field and are closely connected to one another) opting for a religious execution of the normative system that does not jettison any of the community's core principles and those with lower amounts opting for a more flexible implementation that takes into account pragmatic factors (i.e. financial viability, facilitation of operations) as well as

occasionally prioritising self-relevant goals like pleasure. The study categorises the first profile of member as “devotees” and the latter as “appropriators”, with the existence of a third profile of “peripherals” that is only casually participating in the community without engaging in the problematisation of what is the best way to practice.

The conceptualisation of community heterogeneity as a result of members’ different views on what is the most appropriate way to implement a normative system that they are faithful to finds application in a number of examples in daily life. A group of Christians are all having the same faith and the values dictated by it (which at the same time symbolically demarcate them from followers of any other religion), but their practice of it may well differ from person to person. Some may be carefully complying with all the norms, rituals and traditions dictated by Bible or the New Testament, while others, who are no less Christian, may be adapting their practice to account for other needs (for example, an ill person of faith may choose not to fast; taking into account his or her physical/health needs).

The literature across various fields has sought to classify and “profile” members of marketplace cultures. Often these classifications are based on length of service, which distinguishes between those members who have “proven themselves” and their commitment to a particular normative system and those who haven’t (Celsi, Rose and Leigh 1993; Leigh, Peters and Shelton 2006; Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1999; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), as well as based on authenticity of membership that distinguishes between those who are solely interested in iconic imagery and those encompassing a holistic lifestyle as dictated by the collective’s regime (Beverland et al. 2010; Leigh, Peters and Shelton 2006; Wood 2000). Most commonly, however, the classifications refer to concentric social structures that reflect status hierarchies formed depending on the intensity of involvement of members, not unlike Wenger’s et al. (2002) core, marginal and peripheral division. Similar classifications have been identified in the study of various subcultures. Fox (1987) in his study of punk, Klein (1986) in the context of body-building and Schouten and McAlexander (1995) in their study of Harley Davidson bikers, all distinguish between an ideologically committed hard core, a slightly less committed soft core and marginals (also referred to as pretenders). Aside from this status hierarchy, the latter study also presents a larger perspective that recognises sub-groups of practitioners (all with their own unique

hierarchies) that “have their own interpretation of the biker ethos” (48) informed by the different purpose that these groups serve (for example Christian biker clubs or Vietnam veteran bikers). The classification in this study, however, provides insights for cases when such different interpretations of ethos occur within the *same* collective. In other words, rather than distinguishing between authentic and inauthentic membership, this research offers a different interpretation of intra-group taste heterogeneity by accounting for the possibility of a common underlying system of beliefs (based on the community’s positioning in relation to outsiders), the interpretation of which, however, differs amongst members with diverse backgrounds.

The co-existence of these different roles within the same collective also has significant implications in relation to taste making. Devotees and appropriators share common distastes but the intensity of rejection varies amongst them. Wilk (1997) recognises that consumers may be driven by a spectrum of distaste emotions, ranging from dislike to disgust, without however elaborating on the matter. In the study, rejection felt and expressed by devotees is naturally heightened; while their expressions of distaste (or disgust in this case) have a “protectionist” purpose that aims to make sure that the community not only maintains, but also increases its symbolic distance to aversion groups. Expressions of distaste by appropriators, on the other hand, serve a “navigational” purpose that provides cues as to how these members ought to think about their community and an indication as to how to their practices should be aligned to maintain that social position. From this standpoint, when discussing distaste at the collective level, it is important to take into account the existence of different types of rejection behaviour that co-exist within the group and the potential struggles that these might lead to.

Having discussed the sources of heterogeneity within the collective, I should note that rather than having negative effects on the development of the group, on the contrary, taste conflicts act as a motivational force for members of different standing by giving them something “to fight for”. This motivation has its basis in the idea that participants value the purpose and activities of the community (what Bourdieu terms *illusio* or the idea that “the game is worth playing and the stakes created in it are worth pursuing” ([1992] 1996, 228). Accordingly, protecting group-relevant enterprises (e.g. the community’s ethos for devotees or its financial viability for appropriators) and even

self-relevant goals (e.g. pleasure for appropriators) become tasks that incline members of all standing to participate, challenging the rest to stand up for the stakes they are protecting. It could also be argued that heterogeneity is a much needed condition both for improving the participants' experience (by providing motivation for members to protect their stakes) and in the co-creation of value that is generated as a result of members' attempts to deal with struggles. The latter is explored in more detail in the section below.

10.4.3 The Negotiation of Intra-Group Taste Heterogeneity

The findings offer a novel insight into how members deal with taste conflicts by employing a number of strategies. These strategies differ depending on the classification of the member(s) that employ them and are aimed at either promoting own perceptions of "tastefulness" (appropriators: physically narrowing the boundaries of "us", compromising for reaching an end, putting pressure through informal coalitions), to preventing the actualisation of tastes that are perceived as inappropriate (devotees: using the community's structure as a prevention mechanism as well as exercising increased amount of cultural capital and appropriators: putting pressure through forming informal coalitions) or helping to maintain motivation for participation despite disagreement with some of the tastes that get actualised (devotees: symbolically narrowing the boundaries of "us", by turning a blind eye). Given the different levels of participation occurring in communities, devotees (who are more powerful due to their elevated social and cultural capital) are able to pursue their enterprises at the expense of appropriators through the control and manipulation of community resources by employing rhetorical and interpersonal devices (Coopey 1995; Coopey and Burgoyne 2000) that are outside the grasp of the latter. However, appropriators in their own respect are also able to assert a certain amount of influence by taking advantage of their collective power (informal coalitions), while most importantly, participation enables those members to learn how to perform their tastes despite disagreement in the community, by engaging with tools, language and tacit conventions (Gherardi 2009) that allow them to "reach an end".

In asking “how are collective tastes negotiated”, however, one cannot find the answer simply by seeking to find out which cluster of members dominates the negotiation process, precisely because this project was set out on the assumption that there can be no definite or static collective taste. Instead, what the process of negotiation demonstrates (illustrated in a circle in figure 6) is that taste-making at the micro-social level is an ongoing dialogue amongst members of various standings. This dialogue is not conducted on unrestrained terms, but is limited by the boundaries that are set by the community’s oppositional relation to dissimilar others and most importantly, by the normative system that sustains that opposition and which is commonly accepted by all members as *doxa*.

As Wegner et al (2002) argue, participation is characterised by the mutual ability of members to negotiate meanings amongst them and influence each other’s experiences of these, even though this mutuality does not necessarily entail equality or similar levels of authority. Accordingly, collective taste is not reducible to the intentions of clusters of members bearing different ideologies, but emerges as dialogue between the different parties that constantly appraises objects and modes of production/consumption in terms of taste, without ever attributing to them a final or fixed interpretation. Unlike Beverland and Farrelly’s (2011) description of a dialectic conflict between opposing ideologies in the surf subculture, members do not navigate these tensions by engaging in “creative solutions” that protect the dominant ideology. On the contrary, it is the lack of synthesis and consequent constant negotiation amongst the various perceptions that constitutes collective taste and its dynamic nature. Bakhtin ([1981] 1994) uses the term ‘inter-illumination’ to indicate that the meaning of an utterance is not reducible to the intentions of the speaker or to the response of the addressee but emerges between these two (Holquist 1981, 429 – 430). Taste-making is dialogic because the meaning of practices and objects cannot be grounded upon fixed identities, but is the product of difference: firstly, the relational difference between “what we are” as opposed to “what they are” and secondly, the different viewpoints of ingroup members on that first level difference. At the micro social level of interaction the making of taste refers to the interanimation of members’ voices and to the development of a unique perspective of the community’s object of practice and its mode of production, with no necessary “winning side”, overcoming or synthesis of the different viewpoints (an eventual synthesis would make taste making dialectic rather than dialogic) or overcoming of the

struggle. During the dialogic process, value is generated that is both negatively asserted (in relation to “them” and concerning the community as a whole) and positively affirmed (by actualising “doings” that are meaningful to certain types of members). As such, differentiation is achieved both collectively (“us and them”) and individually or sub-collectively when specific members achieve the actualisation of what they perceive to be tasteful.

10.5 Summary of the Theoretical Contributions

The thesis makes a theoretical contribution to the theories of taste/distaste formation, negative symbolic consumption and marketplace cultures.

First, although the extant body of literature discusses, both explicitly and implicitly, some unique contexts in which collective tastes are developed, maintained, contested and negotiated, (to name but a few: indie music consumers in Arsel and Thompson (2010), Apartment Therapy participants in Arsel and Bean (2013), Harley Davidson bikers in Schouten and McAlexander (1995), in-line roller skaters in Cova and Cova (2002), the rave culture in Goulding et al. (2002), Burning Man participants in Kozinets (2002), dance cultures in Thornton (1996) etc), the *holistic* outlook of such community-based practice (accounting both for the status of the collective’s taste in relation to outsiders and its interplay with intra-group taste dynamics) has seldom been discussed. In addition to this, unlike the majority of studies on taste that focus on the role of the construct in the perpetuation of class structures (Holt 1998; Allen 2002; Henry 2005; Üstüner and Holt 2010 etc), the thesis offers insights as to how tastes operate and are practised within one social strata. Such an approach comes in response to calls for research on cultural and horizontal, rather than social, stratifications, as directed by Thornton (1996) and Frith (1996). Indeed, few scholars (Arsel and Bean 2013) have empirically examined those systems of distinctions that divide contemporary culture, with subcultural capital and subcultural taste - as opposed to class taste - becoming all the more relevant (Thornton 1996) to the construction and contextualisation of consumer experience. Conducting an exploratory study on what has been conceptualised as inter-group and intra-group dynamics of taste, I have put forward an integrative framework of collective taste-making that accounts both for the

community's status position in the social space and intra-group heterogeneity. The suggested framework contributes to our understanding of taste as a dialogical process, taking into account the construct's dynamic nature (Holt 1997; 1998; Hennion 2001; 2003; 2007; Arsel and Bean 2013) and placing all emphasis on the "making".

Second, taking a closer look at how communities determine their status position in relation to competitive actors, the study demonstrates how community practices can create symbolic value in relation to "what else is there" within a given dominant field of operation and in extension within secondary relevant domains. More specifically, while rejection behaviour has been identified as more determining in understanding symbolic distinction (Wilk 1997), "very little extant research focuses on the reciprocity of the relationship between positive and negative poles" (Hogg et al. 2009, 154). The work demonstrates how distaste is mirrored in the community's collective taste as a shared understanding about the meaning of positive ingroup practices that are detrimental to those of dissociative others. Contributing to literature on negative symbolic consumption, it proposes that anti-choice (avoidance, abandonment, aversion behaviour) (Hogg 1998; Escalas and Bettman 2005; White and Dhal 2007; Berger and Heath 2008; Hogg et al. 2009) is not the only manner in which distaste operates. Instead, disgust is to be found in the appropriation of practices that, even though on a first instance may seem ill-suited, have been resignified to become "proper to this particular context" through a change in the use of the object of practice and the construction of a sufficient justification for its inclusion. By looking at the manner in which participants of the community manage their production/consumption practices, the thesis suggests that negatively asserted value may be more efficient in enforcing status distinctions, while accounting for distaste through subtle meaning subversions is essential in understanding the surrounding social system, positions and roles of audiences or followers of a particular style or genre.

The study also proposes an embryonic framework of understanding as to who constitutes a dissimilar other when discussing tensions of an "us versus them" fashion. Starting from Bourdieu (1984), who argues that groups located closer in the social space will be in more intense competition and Holt (1998), who explains that taste wars occur within a particular field because it is the particular logic of that field that invests practices with meanings, the majority of studies on marketplace cultures have focused

on describing status competitions contained within particular cultural boundaries (for example indie consumers versus hipsters (Arsel and Thompson 2010), Harley bikers versus car drivers (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), Burning Man participants versus Disneyland goers (Kozinets 2002), Americans versus Canadians (White and Dhal 2007), competition amongst football team fan subcultures (Banister et al. 2005) etc. The findings from this research, however, demonstrate that in proclaiming their sovereignty, members of communities are likely to transcend field boundaries and compete with a very diverse range of dissociative others in order to strengthen the ingroup's distinction. The focal actors used for juxtapositions in each case were found to be related on the aspect of the normative system that the community wishes to glorify on each occasion. Rejecting the massified, fetishised experience offered or lived by dissociative actors across diverse fields, critical consumers attempt to produce themselves authentic diversified experiences for their own consumption. Through communities that are constantly moving between the formal and the informal they are creating an environment which skilfully rejects the industry and society's way as "distasteful". The crafting of this experience, however, and the specification of the community's social position are neither straightforward nor harmonious, but instead comprise an ongoing dialogue amongst heterogeneous voices.

Third, the thesis contributes to the literature on marketplace cultures by offering insights into the relatively underresearched issue of intra-group heterogeneity. Chalmers et al. (2013, 1011) point out that "traditionally, research on community has been dominated by a perspective that privileges the homogeneity of groups", while Martin (1992) also states that research has so far focused on the unifying characteristics of communities. Although multiple authors acknowledge the existence of intra-group differences (for example Beverland et al. (2010) point out the diversity of identity goals sought from membership amongst members of surfer, snowboarder and skater collectives, while Fischer et al. (1996) bring our attention to the utopian view of community as an expression of human solidarity), we still know little about how intra group dynamics impact on the development of communities, in general, and taste-making practices, in particular. With regards to the heterogeneous nature of collectives, the study contributes by shedding light on how members are not necessarily engaging in practices in harmony with one another but despite pursuing varied goals (as Beverland et al. 2010 describe) are able to achieve the continuity of the community and its joint

enterprises. The latter is achieved because heterogeneity of goals generates in participants the feeling of having something “to fight for”. As such, findings provide an alternative explanation comparing to that of Chalmers et al. (2013) as to why heterogeneity can have positive outcomes for the group.

This study also extends our understanding of intra-group heterogeneity by unpacking the interplay amongst the varied voices present in the group. Fragmentation is conceptualised as the result of members’ different interpretations of a commonly accepted normative system. Accordingly, while communities are bound together and set apart from others through shared consumption meanings and practices, a more careful look in intra-group dynamics demonstrates that some of these practices are commonly accepted, some simply co-exist, while others are under dispute (de Valck 2007). By adopting a view of taste-making as a dialogue amongst heterogeneous actors, conducted within the boundaries of a shared understanding in relation to the community’s position in social space, the thesis uncovers the dynamic nature of collective taste and documents how this dialogue is sustained through a number of strategies that allow fragmented members to either actualise their preferences or to protect their illusion by overlooking those aspects of the dialogue that are not in accordance with their views. Participants are in each case “rationalising” these views, drawing upon well-established narratives (devotees) or the pragmatics of life (appropriators), thus maintaining in the process an ongoing dialogue of taste. This conceptualisation of taste-making not only departs from the current emphasis on collective taste as a harmonious, homogenous unit (e.g. Wilk 1997; Arsel and Bean 2013) but it also negates the idea that heterogeneous voices within the collective ultimately get synthesised in a static, distinguishable “communal taste” (Beverland and Farely 2011). As a result, a fuller understanding of taste-making practices in heterogeneous communities is achieved; one that suggests that the outcomes of taste negotiations can only be temporary and relating to execution of preferences in “doings” (e.g. recontextualisation of exo-cultural elements is the outcome of negotiations amongst different members), while the taste-making process in itself is an ongoing interaction (or interanimation) of different voices, with no necessary end-result.

10.6 Limitations

Apart from the methodological limitations discussed in chapter 6, there are several limitations in the study that are summarized below:

First, in order to focus on the construction of meanings at the micro-social level of interaction and the existence of cultural or horizontal hierarchies, any consideration of tastes as unconscious or structure dependent (similarly to Bourdieu 1984) were set aside. However, despite attempts to exclude any discussion about class from this project, the participants' habitus (including social and cultural capital as well as occupation) was found to be the main driver of intra-group heterogeneity and consequently significant in our understanding of dialogical taste, even when examining horizontal (as opposed to class) hierarchies. As such, it is acknowledged that in theorising group heterogeneity it is important first to explore individual's lifehistories (Bertaux and Thompson 2007) in detail, something which was omitted in this study.

Second, the treatment of (dis)taste in this paper has been primarily instrumental, treating the construct as a resource that can be manipulated and used to the group's advantage. This approach ignores individual and group psychology in aesthetic preference, but does so in favour of isolating and studying the conscious and strategic processes of boundary-making.

Third, focus on a particular research question and on achieving specific goals that were set both at the beginning and during the process of collecting data, I had to purposefully ignore a number of emergent issues in the field. Of these, the most important is the group's embarking on a fundraising campaign with the ultimate goal of buying the building that hosts the community (which has been rented for the past 12 years) in December 2013. More specifically, during the last months of my ethnography the group was faced with a major dilemma: leaving the building that has hosted them since the conception of the Brik or raising a large sum of money to buy the property that the landlord had decided to sell. Given that the community is closely bound to the particular space in which it operates (something which was demonstrated throughout this report in relation to the importance that the building plays in taste-making and asserting "us and them" differences) a fundraising campaign was initiated, which

included writing a proposal for a grant to the arts council. During interviews with respondents the matter came up a few times when discussing the community's informal "no external funding policy". Some members were confident that getting money from sponsors like the arts council would in no way affect the autonomy (and most importantly, identity) of the community, while others were less persuaded about the result of this initiative. The role of this "critical incident" in taste-making was excluded from the analysis, because it would require the extension of the fieldwork for at least another year, which was not possible due to time limitations. However, leading back to the discussion about the role of pragmatics and resources in relation to taste, it leaves unanswered the question of how taste-making is affected in extenuating circumstances.

Lastly, on a similar note, the suggested classification of members in devotees, appropriators and marginals can be questioned under the light of such critical incidents. In other words, these positions cannot be assumed to be "fixed" or permanent since there is evidence that devotees might turn to appropriators if circumstances require them to do so (e.g. threat of extinction of the community as described above). The fluidity of roles and the conditions under which devotees, appropriators or peripherals may assume a different position in the community have not been examined.

10.7 Directions for Future Research

The question "how does the organisational structure of communities influence collective taste-making?" is one that could further enhance our understanding of collective taste. More specifically, the chosen context has been renowned for its seemingly flat structure and lack of formal rules (something which was found to be taken advantage of by members of a particular standing). This bears similarities to multiple marketplace cultures (e.g. tribes, subcultures etc), where hierarchies of power are primarily informal status stratifications rather than formally assigned roles. Examining taste-making in a more structured context, however, could enhance our understanding of the interplay between taste and organisational structure. While Bourdieu (1984) has extensively explored the relationship between legitimisation of tastes and class hierarchies (with those at the top defining the dominant tastes of each

era), formal organisational (as opposed to class) hierarchies have not previously been taken into account in matters of taste. In fact, after concluding the ethnography at the cooperative, I negotiated access and conducted two interviews with members of a privately owned golf-club. The purpose of this was to make a comparative study between the not formally structured co-op and the golf club, which while having a formal team of managers responsible for all (including taste) decisions, is also informally managed by its powerful, long-serving members. The comparative study was not completed as part of the PhD due to time limitations but is an avenue for future research.

Most importantly, the study concluded that taste-making at the micro-social level is a dialogical process. However, a lot remains to be done with regards to how this dialogue is sustained and evolving in the collective context. In other words, the dialogical circle illustrated in figure 6, requires closer observation and analysis to increase our understanding of the interaction amongst members, potential “conversions” of participants assuming one role to another, power dynamics as well as the changing of individual members’ perceptions of tastefulness as a result of the dialogue.

In relation to the latter, while the project was focused at the micro-social level of interaction and aimed to understand collective taste, significant space for research remains in exploring how inter-and intra-group dynamics affect taste at the individual level. Findings in chapter 9, similarly to Arnould and Price (2000) and Beverland et al. (2010), indicate that members seek to satisfy a number of goals by participating in the community, some of which are individual and others collective oriented. While the thesis focused on the collective orientation, the effect of participation at individual members’ tastes could provide us with interesting insights as to how dialogic taste-making impacts individual status positions.

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Appendix

1. Participant Observation Grid

Descriptive Question Matrix

	SPACE	OBJECT	ACT	ACTIVITY
SPACE	Can you describe in detail all the places?	What are all the ways space is organized by objects?	What are all the ways space is organized by acts?	What are all the ways space is organized by activities?
OBJECT	Where are objects located?	Can you describe in detail all the objects?	What are all the ways objects are used in acts?	What are all the ways objects are used in activities?
ACT	Where do acts occur?	How do acts incorporate the use of objects?	Can you describe in detail all the acts?	How are acts a part of activities?
ACTIVITY	What are all the places activities occur?	What are all the ways activities incorporate objects?	What are all the ways activities incorporate acts?	Can you describe in detail all the activities?
EVENT	What are all the places events occur?	What are all the ways events incorporate objects?	What are all the ways events incorporate acts?	What are all the ways events incorporate activities?
TIME	Where do time periods occur?	What are all the ways time affects objects?	How do acts fall into time periods?	How do activities fall into time periods?
ACTOR	Where do actors place themselves?	What are all the ways actors use objects?	What are all the ways actors use acts?	How are actors involved in activities?
GOAL	Where are goals sought and achieved?	What are all the ways goals involve use of objects?	What are all the ways goals involve acts?	What activities are goal seeking or linked to goals?
FEELING	Where do the various feeling states occur?	What feelings lead to the use of what objects?	What are all the ways feelings affect acts?	What are all the ways feelings affect activities?

EVENT	TIME	ACTOR	GOAL	FEELING
What are all the ways space is organized by events?	What spatial changes occur over time?	What are all the ways space is used by actors?	What are all the ways space is related to goals?	What places are associated with feelings?
What are all the ways that objects are used in events?	How are objects used at different times?	What are all the ways objects are used by actors?	How are objects used in seeking goals?	What are all the ways objects evoke feelings?
How are acts a part of events?	How do acts vary over time?	What are the ways acts are performed by actors?	What are all the ways acts are related to goals?	What are all the ways acts are linked to feelings?
What are all the ways activities are part of events?	How do activities vary at different times?	What are all the ways activities involve actors?	What are all the ways activities involve goals?	How do activities involve feelings?
Can you describe in detail all the events?	How do events occur over time? Is there any sequencing?	How do events involve the various actors?	How are events related to goals?	How do events involve feelings?
How do events fall into time periods?	Can you describe in detail all the time periods?	When are all the times actors are "on stage"?	How are goals related to time periods?	When are feelings evoked?
How are actors involved in events?	How do actors change over time or at different times?	Can you describe in detail all the actors?	Which actors are linked to which goals?	What are the feelings experienced by actors?
What are all the ways events are linked to goals?	Which goals are scheduled for which times?	How do the various goals affect the various actors?	Can you describe in detail all the goals?	What are all the ways goals evoke feelings?
What are all the ways feelings affect events?	How are feelings related to various time periods?	What are all the ways feelings involve actors?	What are the ways feelings influence goals?	Can you describe in detail all the feelings?

2. Interview Questionnaire Guide

Note: This is an approximate guide of the questions most often asked during the in-depth interviews. The guide does not represent the order that the different matters were discussed in, nor it is exhaustive. Multiple questions were the result of improvisation in response to particular points made by the respondents and as a result are not included in the sections below.

Opening Questions

- When did you start volunteering at the Brik? How did you come across the Brik community? What made you join the group? What was your impression of the community before joining? How has your role evolved throughout this time?

The Nature of the Community

- What is the Brik? How would you describe it? What are the community's aims? How does the Brik work? How would you describe the Brik participants? What do you enjoy most about the Brik? What do you dislike the most about the Brik? How would you describe the programming mix? How would you describe the space? What is special about the Brik? In what ways is the community dysfunctional?

Collective Decision Making

- How are decisions being made? How are programming decisions made? Are there any requirements for joining the programming team? How are ideas put forward? How are ideas selected/rejected? What happens when the group disagrees on a particular point? Do members have an equal say in the running of the venue? If not, why is that the case? (Additional questions specific to events observed: What happened then? Can you recall and describe any similar situations?)

Audience

- Can you describe your audience(s)? Are you programming with a particular audience in mind? How does the Brik audience compare to the audience of other

art venues? Are there any social groups that you would like to reach out to? Are there any social groups you would prefer to not see in the audience? What does the audience think about the Brik?

Comparisons with Outgroups

- How does the Brik compare to other arts spaces in the city? Do you visit other venues in the city? Which ones? Can you compare your response to the Brik? What are the similarities/differences amongst them?

Questions Directed at Longserving (>4 years) Participants Only

- Can you take me back to the time when the Brik first started operating? What was the motivation behind it? What was its purpose? How did it get to grow? What changes were brought on in its mission/operations with the passage of time and introduction of new members?

3. Interview Participants Table

Respondent Name	Length of Participation in Community	Highest Level of Education	Occupation	Age
Patrick	5 Years	BA Modern History	Artist, unemployed at time of interview	41
Jake	2 Years	BA Anthropology	Musician, no steady job	43
Jane	2 Months	BA Sociology	Secondary School Teaching Assistant	25
Neal	2 Years	BA Philosophy	Project Manager for Insurance Company	34
Penny	1,5 Year	BSc Finance and Accountancy	Retired Accountant	64
Johnny	8 Years	BSc Electrical Engineering	Electrical Engineer	42
Billy	1,5 Year	BA Film Studies	Administrative Assistant	27
Jack	7 Years	MSc History	Secondary School Teacher	39
Max	12 Years	BA Fine Art	Artist	40
Frances	10 Years	BA Fine Art	Artist	44
Mark	10 Years	Secondary School, Short Course in Cultural Media and Film	Administrative Assistant	48
Alex	2 Years	BA History	Administrative Assistant	41
Lisa	1 Year	BSc Care Management	Carer	28
Daniel	12 Years	BA Film Studies	Artist	45
Robbie	4 Months	PhD Epidemiology	Doctoral Student	28

